

COMMISSIONING  
NEW ART  
FOR CHURCHES:  
A GUIDE FOR  
PARISHES  
& ARTISTS

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# INTRODUCTION

St Augustine's vision of God was of a beauty at once 'ancient but also fresh'. New artwork commissions should do justice to the challenges of the contemporary world while being rooted in an apprehension of the Christian mystery and church tradition. This requires profound dialogue between artists who do not just want 'to do their own thing' and patrons with spiritual and liturgical discernment.

Artworks make a significant contribution to many churches, whether as stained glass, paintings, altar frontals, sculpture or another art form. At their best they will aid worship, inspire prayer or help us experience the presence of God. New art for a church should have this high ambition.

Whatever the reason is for commissioning or introducing new art the guidance here will assist in setting out a clear pathway from initial idea, through preparing a brief, choosing an artist and gaining permission – which are all necessary before work starts on the artwork itself.

The 16,000 parish churches of England are repositories of English polite and vernacular art from many centuries. These guidelines are designed to assist those responsible for parish churches today to ensure that the legacy of the 21st century will be as eloquent and enduring as the best of the past.

As a general rule new art should not be at the expense of existing art of quality. Where an existing work of art, whether window, altar frontal, banner or statue, possesses presence, devotional power and/or historic interest it should not be supplanted – even where it might be considered old-fashioned or be in need of conservation. The presumption should lie with adding to the interest of the church in question, not depleting it.

Front cover

**John Maine RA,  
Special Air Service Regimental  
Association window (detail), Hereford  
Cathedral, 2017**

Photo © Tom Maine



# SETTING UP A COMMISSIONING GROUP

Commissioning new art will require sustained work from a dedicated group of people. It is most appropriate for a group to be appointed for the purpose, small enough to be effective and efficient. It needs to have the authority of the PCC behind its appointment but look beyond the PCC for its membership. It should keep a sufficient record of its business for it to be clear how decisions are reached.

Membership of the group could include the incumbent or a churchwarden, an interested member of the parish (who may not have professional experience in the area) and at least one person with expert knowledge, who may be brought in following advice from a gallery, museum, public arts agency or university. A maximum of four people should be sufficient.

Even when a patron or donor has presented themselves to the parish with the offer of new art it is still appropriate to set up a commissioning group and follow the advice in this guide.

Some churches wish to include local schools, for example, in the design process. It is important that the terms of involvement are clear and that no commitment is made to use any of the suggestions in the form that they are presented. Considerable disappointment can be caused if working with local partners is not carefully considered and defined.



**Giampaolo Babetto**  
**Candle holder for the**  
**Dick Sheppard Chapel,**  
**St Martin's-in-the-Fields, London,**  
**2015–16, Curated by Modus**  
**Operandi**

Photo © Benjamin Westoby



# THE BRIEF

Preparing the brief is crucial to the commissioning process – it should identify a definite proposal with an adequate budget to install an excellent work of art. The brief is a set of criteria that must be agreed by the designated commissioning group, who will represent the parish and see the process through. The brief should enable all those involved (congregation, PCC, DAC, Chancellor, artists and any other interested parties) to understand as clearly as possible the purpose and aims of the commission, without unduly inhibiting the artist's creative response to the challenge.

The brief should be accompanied by statements of significance and needs (advice on preparing these can be found at [www.churchcare.co.uk](http://www.churchcare.co.uk)). These are essential because they acknowledge the specific historical context of the building and the intention of the new work.

**The brief** should reflect the shared enthusiasm and will of the community;

**The quality** of the work commissioned should be of the highest order: excellent in terms of its vision, design, handling of materials and longevity;

Your **theological and liturgical themes** should be set out clearly and concisely, but avoid swamping the artists with words – leave sufficient space for interpretation;

**Identify the possible site(s)** for the commission, making specific reference to aspects of the context you consider relevant, such as light levels, adjacent artefacts, materials, history of the building and use of the space;

If you know what **medium** you want for the artwork, or the **dimensions** it will need to fit within, specify this in the brief;

Set a **realistic budget**, taking advice if necessary, with a thorough audit of all eventual project costs. This should cover: initial design costs, installation, lighting, structural issues, remedial repairs required, photography, maintenance and increased insurance;

**Set out the procedure and criteria** for comparing the artists' initial ideas. Agree an adequate fee for their initial designs and include an opt-out clause if none finds sufficient approval;

**Make clear the stages** in the commissioning journey, ensuring you include the faculty jurisdiction process (to get permission for the new work), which may add several months. Remember that the faculty process may well be new to many artists and could require them to amend their original design, its costing and how long they are involved in your project;

**The work may need to be phased** on a timeline, with a staged payment agreement written into the artist's (fabricator's/subcontractor's) contract(s). If the artist is not producing the artwork themselves who is to pay the cost of fabrication? These contracts must be formally set out in writing and agreed;

The individual members of the commissioning group need to be allocated **specific roles** to spread the responsibility. While it is important that one person is appointed the main point of contact, ensure that information is fully shared among the group, in case of a change of circumstances.

Opposite  
**Rona Smith**  
**North Elevation,**  
**Lumen Church (URC),**  
**London, 2008**

Photo ©Nick Kane

# ARTIST SELECTION

The commissioning group will need to select an artist by evaluating the various proposals against the brief. It is worth bearing in mind the following points when selecting an artist.

## Sources of advice

A list of web-based resources for finding artists is provided at the end of this document. Your DAC secretary can tell you where to find examples of artists working in churches in the diocese (but should not be asked to recommend an artist). Local museums and art galleries, public arts officers or the art departments of a nearby university can also be useful sources of advice.

## Agents

Commissioning a work of art is not something a parish does very often so it may be helpful to use consultants to guide you through the process. They will have experience of processes and artists, but bear in mind they may have preferred artists and craftsmen and look carefully at their fee structure.

## Competitions

Running a competition is a good way to generate ideas. You can either invite a limited number of artists to submit ideas or run an open competition. There are plenty of free listing services for artists' opportunities which you can make use of. You will need to think about whether you ask artists to submit proposals digitally or in hard copy (be prepared to offer to return material in the post), and what else you would wish them to submit (CV, previous commissions etc.). Put the term 'artist opportunities uk' into a search engine to identify places to post your call.

It's important to remember that it costs an artist to prepare a proposal so a competition should not be seen as a cheap way to secure ideas. Ideally, if you want to run a competition, you should invite a small number of artists to submit ideas – and be prepared to pay them for doing so.

At the artist selection stage it's important to think laterally and beyond local artists and craftsmen. Look at national and international practitioners. The best artist for your church may well be someone who understands your particular vision rather than sharing your precise background of faith. Leave the artist to respond to the brief and draw up proposals. Try to avoid micro-managing the creative process. You want the best artist for the site chosen for the commission and someone who will work happily with you and the congregation.

## Final selection

Once your chosen artist/s has/have submitted their proposals, you need to evaluate them. Consider whether they meet the brief in terms of quality and congruency – does the proposed commission look right in your building alongside the current furnishings and fittings? – and in terms of inspirational qualities. If, once having done this work, you are unsure that you actually want to go ahead with a new artwork, admit it. For this reason don't make commitments before you know that you are willing to honour them.

## Consult

Hopefully you have been consulting with all interested parties, both within the parish and more widely, as your vision has developed. This is crucial. Don't try to avoid public debate and never underestimate the knowledge of interested parties. Commissioning is not a democratic process, but it must be sympathetic to popular feeling, particularly if you need to raise money to finance the commission. You might also need to take advice from a technical specialist on the fabrication of the work if this is not to be undertaken by the artist.

When you make your final choice of artist and proposal have the confidence to choose your artist because he or she has answered your brief and promises to produce something that has artistic excellence and expresses our Christian faith. Resist the temptation to have a vote.

Opposite

**Victoria Burgher**

**The city sets sail, All Hallows-by-the-Tower, London, 2016,**

Photo © Victoria Burgher







## THE PROCESS after selection of the artist through to completion of the artwork

### Design development

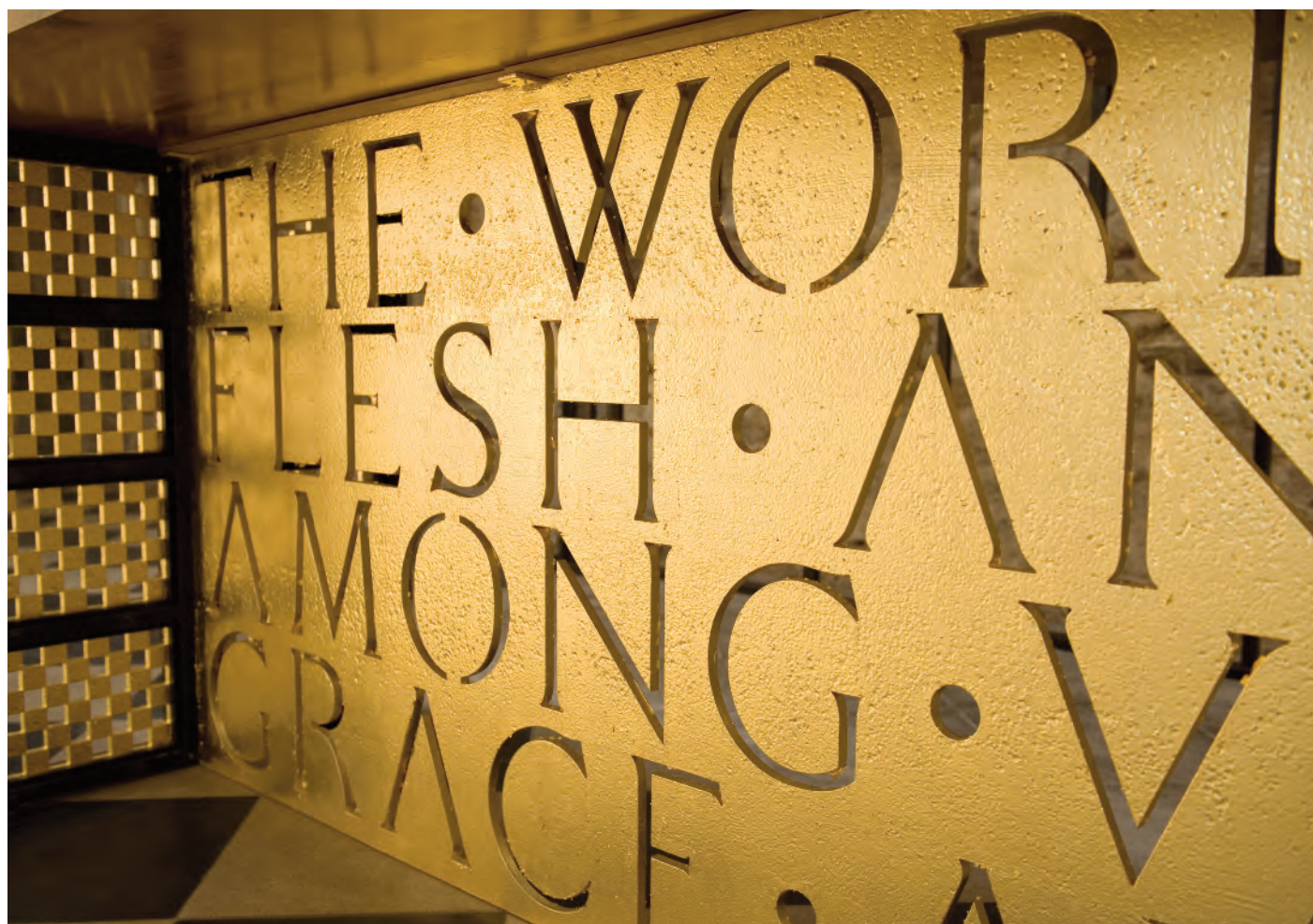
Once selected, the artist will need to prepare a more fully worked-up design for the commissioning group. The artist should provide a statement to show how they responded to the brief. This should be supported by a technical statement and scale drawing or model that shows the materials to be used, how it is going to be installed (including any fixing devices) and any impact this may have on the fabric of your building (as well as how these procedures can be reversed). The PCC should be kept up to date with key developments.

### Consultation

After the design finds favour with the commissioning group the consultation process can start with the PCC, congregation and community. The DAC and Chancellor will look for strong support for the project from the parish. One way of engaging the parish is to display the proposed design over a number of weeks so people have a chance to see and discuss it in situ. Before the PCC's decision it's worth asking the artist to give a talk about their work, the new design and its possible interpretations. It's also useful to display a concise artist's statement alongside the proposal.

It is essential to seek the informal advice of the DAC at an early stage (see Legal Necessities). The DAC will advise you who else may need to be consulted, for example Historic England, and the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, the Georgian Group, the Victorian Society, the Ancient Monuments Society or the 20th Century Society as appropriate. The faculty rules require consultation with the Church Buildings Council for new works of art and your DAC will advise you on this. Early consultation is always preferred and allows time for constructive engagement.

**John Maddison**  
**Lady Chapel altar,**  
**Ely Cathedral, 2011**  
Photo ©John Maddison





## Faculty

When you have finalised your design it is then formally presented to the DAC for consideration. The DAC will issue a notification of advice.

It is a legal requirement to obtain a faculty (permission issued by the Chancellor of the diocesan court authorising the work) before any new item is installed in a church (even if the item is a gift). Exceptions can be made for specified periods for temporary exhibitions or displays, but you should seek advice from the diocesan registry in these cases.

When submitting designs for a faculty application include a copy of the original brief and the artist's statement to contextualise the purpose of the artwork and its iconography together with the technical statement. Ensure that you provide good quality images – poor quality images may prevent the proposal being seen in its best light. Your DAC Secretary and then the Diocesan Registrar will guide you in this. Bear in mind that the faculty process can take several months.

**Antonia Hockton**  
*The River of Life,*  
St George's Church, Great Bromley,  
2014–5

Photo ©Antonia Hockton



## Execution

Once a faculty is granted it is important for the commissioning group to keep an eye on the progress of the project. It may be a nice idea to visit the artist to see the work at a midway point, both to reassure them and you. Artists appreciate having a designated single point of contact with the parish. Perhaps ask the artist to keep a photographic record of the commission in progress for the interest of the parish and as an archival document.

Decide at what point and how the commission will be signed off and the final payment made to the artist. Issuing an architect's certificate is the routine way of concluding an installation of permanent fixtures. Also remember that lighting may need installing or adjusting to properly illuminate the commission.

Take some good photographs when the work is installed to act as a condition report in case of future repairs or replacement.

Maintenance needs to be considered in advance. Take advice from the artist about the most suitable methods and materials for cleaning and maintaining the work, how long it is projected to last and how to handle the work if it ever needs to be moved. Be sure to file a set of instructions for the benefit of your successors.







# TEMPORARY WORKS, EXHIBITIONS & LOANS

There is a growing trend for artists to work on commissions that are designed to be temporary, particularly in buildings of historic significance where placing permanent artworks can be problematic and expensive. Working with an artist on a temporary commission can be as rewarding for a parish as a permanent project and carries many of the same provisos described above. But there are some allowances and limitations to temporary works that are worth considering:

## Reflection

A work that is temporary may, in the best sense, stretch the boundaries of what is normally acceptable in a place of worship. For example, an installation that would hamper the parish's regular liturgical practice can, for a short period, challenge the congregation and clergy to appreciate afresh the significance of liturgy. Or it can be an opportunity to explore more experimental and ephemeral art forms.

## Theme

Temporary works can be very effective in addressing different liturgical seasons. Stations of the Cross, for example, are a good way of inviting different interpretations of a major Christian theme and need only be exhibited during Lent and Holy Week.

## Duration

Temporary works can give impetus to a short but intense period of involvement from the parish. Holding artist-run workshops, giving over a part of the church as 'studio space' or briefing an artist to respond to the congregation, as well as the building, can all be ways of maximising the significance and lasting effects of a project. Take care to specify precisely how long the project will last and to photograph the work and any related events.

## Sale

If work is made for a church on a temporary basis there may be the possibility at the end of its exhibition to sell it to help the parish cover its costs. If this is the case, the parish should be careful to set out from the start the conditions of the sale of work and any percentage the artist will receive. Make sure that there is an agreed plan for what will happen to the work at the end of the exhibition. See the 'The Brief' and 'Legal Necessities' for guidance on contractual arrangements with an artist.

## Permissions

A parish should be aware that most temporary works or exhibitions will require a faculty from the Chancellor and the timescale for seeing through a project should reflect this.

## Loans

Artworks can often be loaned on a temporary basis, which can be more cost-effective for a parish that can't afford to purchase a permanent work. However, the parish must be responsible for having a clear timeframe for the exhibition of an artwork and, once the term of the loan has elapsed, it must decide whether to apply for a permanent faculty to acquire the work. There are many inappropriate works of art that have simply been left behind in churches. Parishes must also feel empowered to say 'no' to benefactors who wish to loan or donate an artwork if they feel it would not be appropriate to acquire the work long term. They should always take professional advice from those with expertise in valuations as to whether the work is of the value its donor claims. It would be worthwhile putting a simple loan agreement in place to fix who will cover transport costs, insurance, etc. Other possible considerations: lighting and other installation costs; security; interpretation (make explanatory text available).

Opposite  
**Mo Enright**  
*The Easter Story, St Mary's Church,*  
**Leamington Spa, 2001–2**  
Photo ©Mo Enright

## WELCOMING THE NEW COMMISSION

Welcoming an artwork into your church should be a celebratory event. The new commission may provide an opportunity for workshops with local schools, colleges or art groups – this is an opportunity for local press coverage and a chance to invite people into your church who are interested in art but do not normally attend services.

## LEGAL NECESSITIES

For any successful commission, the law applicable to the introduction of art into churches, whether permanent or temporary, must be fully understood by all concerned.

For both the commissioning and introduction of new art a written contract is essential. Depending upon the complexity and cost, your contract should include the staging of payments as and when specified stages are reached, as well as a break clause in appropriate cases. It may also be a good idea to clarify that, once complete, the artist may not alter their work. Guidance on an artist contract is available from Artists Newsletter Magazine (<https://www.artistsnewsletter.co.uk/explore/network/for/sample+contract>) and Artquest (<https://www.artquest.org.uk/artlaw/>).

All those concerned, including the artist, must be made aware of the law applicable to particular articles: ecclesiastical law, for example, requires that chalices and patens (the plate holding the Eucharistic bread) are made of gold, silver or another suitable metal, and although occasionally ignored in the past, covers are required under canon law for all fonts. Any font design should therefore incorporate a cover not only so that the ultimate design is all of a piece but so that delay and extra expense is not incurred later in the process. Church law also demands that there should be no commemoration of a person in church (apart possibly from a deceased incumbent) unless the life of that person has been particularly exceptional, locally, regionally or nationally. So that this may be weighed objectively most (if not all) dioceses expect a period of at least two years to pass before the introduction of such a memorial is considered.



# INSURANCE ESSENTIALS

Insuring works of art is not difficult but you can avoid unexpected surprises by consulting your insurers early on. It may not cost you anything to add the artwork to your insurance cover providing its value is less than a certain amount.

Your insurer may ask about, and advise you on, any security or preventative measures if they are considered to be necessary.

## Value of the commission

The value of the item will determine not only the premium but also the level of the security and other protection that may be required. Susceptibility to theft also hinges on desirability and recognisability. The new commission may impact on other valuables making them more vulnerable. Security such as an intruder alarm is usually only required in exceptional circumstances

When new stained glass is being commissioned, its protection should be considered during the design and making stages: good protection can even become part of the art itself.

If the Commission is sited in the open then its vulnerability to theft and/or malicious damage needs to be addressed. As some installations are designed to be 'used' by people consider their safety when doing so. It is also as well to think of how children or others might use the commission in ways unintended by the artist.

If an item is on loan or exhibition it is essential that the terms and responsibilities are understood in relation to their insurance, delivery and return. Condition reports should be carried out upon delivery and return. Also remember that loaned items will need insurance while in transit.



**Wally Gilbert**  
**Aumbry to hold the Holy Oils,**  
**St David's Cathedral, Pembrokeshire,**  
**2013**

Photo © Wally Gilbert

# SOURCES OF INFORMATION

## Choosing an artist

If you are ready to commission a new art work for your church, there are a number of directories which can help you identify appropriate artists for your project. The directories listed here include crafts people, fine artists, specific crafts/arts and regional craft guilds/societies. There are many other directories for artists online.

This guide is intended as a starting point in your search, it is not an exhaustive list of all the available online directories for artists and crafts people.

## General directories for crafts people

The **National Register of Makers (NRM)** provides the largest register of contemporary craft makers in the UK.  
[www.craftscouncil.org.uk/directory/](http://www.craftscouncil.org.uk/directory/)

The **Heritage Crafts Association (HCA)** provides an online directory which features profiles of those who have become Friends of the HCA. You are able to search the directory by craft category or keyword. Each individual profile displays contact information, details of the type of work they do and shows their location on an interactive map.

<http://themakers.directory/craft-directory/>

The **Society of Designer Craftsmen** promotes and supports the work of designers and makers who specialise in crafts.  
[www.societyofdesignercraftsmen.org.uk/members.php?c=members](http://www.societyofdesignercraftsmen.org.uk/members.php?c=members)

**Lettering Arts Trust** Artists who specialise in the design and making of memorials.  
[www.letteringartstrust.org.uk](http://www.letteringartstrust.org.uk)

**Letter Exchange** has a broad membership which includes carvers, calligraphers and typeface designers.  
[www.letterexchange.org/](http://www.letterexchange.org/)

## General directories for fine artists

**Axis** is the online resource for UK contemporary art. The directory is particularly useful for searching for fine artists.  
[www.axisweb.org/Directory.aspx](http://www.axisweb.org/Directory.aspx)

**Artists Directory** is a showcase of British visual artists. It includes artists that specialise in painting, drawing, illustration, printmaking, sculpture, ceramic art, photography, textile art, glass art and calligraphic art.  
[www.artistsdirectory.co.uk/default.aspx](http://www.artistsdirectory.co.uk/default.aspx)

There are a number of guilds and societies for specific arts and crafts that provide information and contact details of specialists within a particular discipline. The following examples are not comprehensive, but will be useful.

The **British Society of Master Glass Painters (BSMGP)** is an organisation which is devoted to the art and craft of stained glass.  
[www.bsmgp.org.uk/people.php](http://www.bsmgp.org.uk/people.php)

The **Worshipful Company of Glaziers & Painters of Glass** website contains a list of artists.  
[www.worshipfulglaziers.com/artists/](http://www.worshipfulglaziers.com/artists/)

The **Contemporary Glass Society (CGS)** have a directory focuses on artists that specialise in contemporary glass design.  
[www.cgs.org.uk/members](http://www.cgs.org.uk/members)

The **Master Carvers Association** is the oldest association of wood and stone carvers in the UK. A list of all of the members of the society is provided under the 'Members' section. The 'Specialities' section, includes an 'ecclesiastical' sub-section.  
[www.mastercarvers.co.uk/members.htm](http://www.mastercarvers.co.uk/members.htm)

The **Royal School of Needlework (RSN)** is the international centre of excellence for the art of hand embroidery.  
[www.royal-needlework.org.uk/content/5/](http://www.royal-needlework.org.uk/content/5/)

## Other sources of help

**Art & Christianity Enquiry (ACE)** is the leading UK organisation in the field of art and religion and offers advice, publications and curated projects.  
[www.acetrust.org](http://www.acetrust.org)

**Modus Operandi** is a leading independent agency for art in the public realm.  
[www.modusoperandi-art.com](http://www.modusoperandi-art.com)

**Commission4Mission** aims to encourage the commissioning and placing of contemporary Christian Art in churches.  
[www.commissionformission.blogspot.co.uk](http://www.commissionformission.blogspot.co.uk)



# ChurchCare



## Funding your artwork

**The Jerusalem Trust** commissions new works of art for places of worship and is part of the Sainsbury Family Charitable Trusts.

T 020 7410 0330

[www.sfct.org.uk/jerusalem.html](http://www.sfct.org.uk/jerusalem.html)

The **Cottam Will Trust** is 'for the purchase, for the advancement of religion, of objects of beauty to be placed in ancient Gothic churches in England or Wales'. It is administered by the Trustees of The Friends of Friendless Churches. Grants have ranged from £2,000 to £50,000 and recipients have included bells, statues, murals, candlesticks, vestments, stained glass altars and frontals.

<http://friendsoffriendlesschurches.org.uk/funding-for-art/>

The **Christian Arts Trust** provides a unique opportunity for artists with Christian faith to develop new ideas and projects.

[www.christianartstrust.org/](http://www.christianartstrust.org/)

The **Gibbs Trust** supports Christian causes and the creative arts.

[www.gibbstrust.org.uk](http://www.gibbstrust.org.uk)

The **Arts Council** invests in arts and culture will consider applications from individuals and organisations for projects under £15,000 via its Grants for the Arts scheme.

[www.artscouncil.org.uk/funding](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/funding)

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Published in partnership with  
Art and Christianity Enquiry (ACE)



Designed by Phil Baines

Back cover  
**Emily Young**  
*Lunar Disc I,*  
**Salisbury Cathedral, 2004**  
Photo ©Ash Mills

