



The AEC Arts Advisory Board seeks to inspire and resource cathedrals in their engagement with contemporary art, particularly through special exhibitions, installations and events, writes Julia Porter-Pryce

There is a growing body of evidence for the impact of these activities on visitor numbers, market segmentation, income generation and community outreach – quantitative measures. Assumptions are usually made about the qualitative impact on spiritual, emotional, religious experiences, mostly based on anecdotal evidence gathered from volunteers and cathedral floor staff. Evaluation methods mostly focus on operational matters. Capturing personal responses, either on site or after a visit, is more complex.

Through conversations with cathedral staff, clergy, curators, arts managers and artists, it is hoped that practical resources can be developed eg curating workshops for clergy/cathedral staff; volunteer training on visitor engagement with installations; simple and effective ways of capturing audience feedback, both digital and analogue

A survey has been devised by the Arts Advisory Board as a framework for conversations. The questionnaire is followed up with a 1-hour telephone/video call. Alongside the conversations, there are case studies of a number of cathedrals' arts programmes reflecting the diversity of organisations and locations.

To take part in the survey or case studies, contact Julia Porter-Pryce juliafrancesporter@gmail.com



Newsletter

Winter 25/26

Welcome to our Winter Newsletter. We are using this edition to update you about a research project we have commissioned to help our thinking around placing art in these precious sacred spaces. You may remember we were looking for a way to evaluate the impact these exhibitions might have on our different audiences - whether congregations, the wider cathedral community, or our visitors. And how are we to persuade people that this is the place to find fresh ways to tell our story, create a narrative, be bolder in our use of space, open up new dialogues?

So, I am really pleased to introduce you to Julia Porter-Pryce, curator, priest and Prebendary Emerita of St Paul's Cathedral, who has a long passion for enabling art in sacred spaces. Julia is currently carrying out a piece of research for us here on the Arts Advisory Board to delve deeper into the impact of contemporary art in cathedrals, focusing particularly on audience experiences. Do please take part in her research, which you can do both on the telephone and in person.

With best wishes for a fruitful Lent.

The Very Revd Jonathan Greener
Dean of Exeter, chair of the Arts Advisory Board.

Other News:

Durham Cathedral's *Magna Carta in the North* exhibition saw record visitor numbers and won marketing campaign of the year (not for profit) in the North East Marketing Awards.

Durham is currently in talks with Jacqueline Creswell on future exhibitions.

Winchester Cathedral's innovative *Whales* exhibition (right) has been shortlisted for a Cultural Enterprises Award for Best Event in 2025. It won the Engaging People Award from the Association of Heritage Interpretation in October 2025. *Whales* is now on display in Rochester Cathedral.

Chichester Cathedral too is shortlisted for Marketing Campaign of the Year at the Cultural Enterprises Awards for its Chichester950 anniversary campaign.

Bradford City of Culture – how to take advantage of this unique opportunity for arts and culture

When Bradford was named UK City of Culture 2025, the Cathedral recognised the year as a unique and time-limited opportunity. Learning from previous City of Cultures, and from faith leaders who had experienced them, it was clear that large cultural programmes often move at a pace that disadvantages faith communities. An early and deliberate decision, therefore, was to focus Cathedral and wider faith community programming on facilitation, professional partnership, and realistic scale rather than symbolic representation.

Consultation across Bradford's faith communities confirmed this approach. There was a strong desire to honour the city's religious history and its interfaith relationships, but also uncertainty about how cultural commissioning and delivery actually works. One practical conclusion shaped multiple programming decisions: faith-based projects would only be pursued where professional artists and cultural practitioners could lead or co-produce the work, ensuring quality, sustainability, and care for the communities involved.

From this emerged a three-fold strategy that guided us: to act as patron, prophet, and promoter.

Acting as patron, without patronising, meant, for the Cathedral, collaborating on projects such as the Gideon Klein production with the Jewish community and the Methodist Modern Art Collection trail - initiatives where professional leadership, external funding, and clear infrastructure were in place. It also meant advising faith partners against proposals that would place undue burden on volunteers or rely on uncertain funding.

The prophetic shaped what the Cathedral declined as well as what it hosted. Programming resisted treating faith as a cultural artefact or prestige symbol and instead prioritised work where faith was encountered as lived practice and narrative. This meant we utilised our seat around civic tables to advocate for the reality of faith experienced across the traditions in our district.

As promoter, the Cathedral consistently supported the wider City of Culture programme, hosting central events, and positioning itself as a confident and reliable cultural partner.

As a result, visitor numbers increased significantly, staff engagement remained high, and national broadcasts placed the Cathedral firmly within Bradford's cultural life.

Looking back, the year was optimised not by scale, but by clarity of decision-making. The strategy safeguarded a way of working that honoured Bradford's history while enabling faith communities to participate with integrity, skill, and confidence.



Weaving Stories – the centrepiece of Bradford Cathedral's contribution to UK City of Culture. Artist Shaeron Caton-Rose led the project which saw visitors add their own stories to the loom in the cathedral. (With funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund).

Available for tour:

Halima Cassell, *Virtues of Unity*

<https://www.virtuesofunity.com/home>

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

Renaud Muraire – Sacred Resonance

Do contact Jacqueline Creswell to find out more about the above works and for any help and support with an artistic idea or project, or simply to find out more.

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