

JOURNEY TO THE CROSS

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Social Anthropological Report on the Stations of the Cross Exhibition at Lichfield Cathedral

By Kathryn Walker MA FRAI



'The Journey to The Cross' exhibition - artwork by Peter Walker FRSA MRBS

INTRODUCTION

From 5th March to the 23rd April 2019, Lichfield Cathedral Artist in Residence Peter Walker exhibited the second part of a new interpretation of The Stations of The Cross entitled 'Journey to the Cross'. This was the culmination of two years' work to create a contemporary fine-art telling of Jesus' journey through Jerusalem to Calvary and his crucifixion, death and burial.

In 2018 the first installation of artworks entitled 'Imagining the Crucifixion' showcased the re-interpretation of the fourteen stations of the cross through artists eyes giving an art historical perspective in order to offer a contemporary new approach for people to explore Christ's journey to the Cross in an accessible way and to encourage a wider audience to engage with the liturgical story.

The objectives discussed with the artist by the Dean of Lichfield Cathedral -The Very Rev. Adrian Dorber - were to offer new interpretation to show a contemporary view of an important part of the liturgy through experimental and creative ways of bringing the visceral and tactile elements as well as the sentiment of the crucifixion to visitors to the Cathedral.

Through the collaboration between the artist and Lichfield Cathedral these objectives aimed to create a depiction of the Stations of the Cross for visitors which would not be a literal interpretation but would aim to allow people physical space and time to absorb and engage with the Crucifixion story.

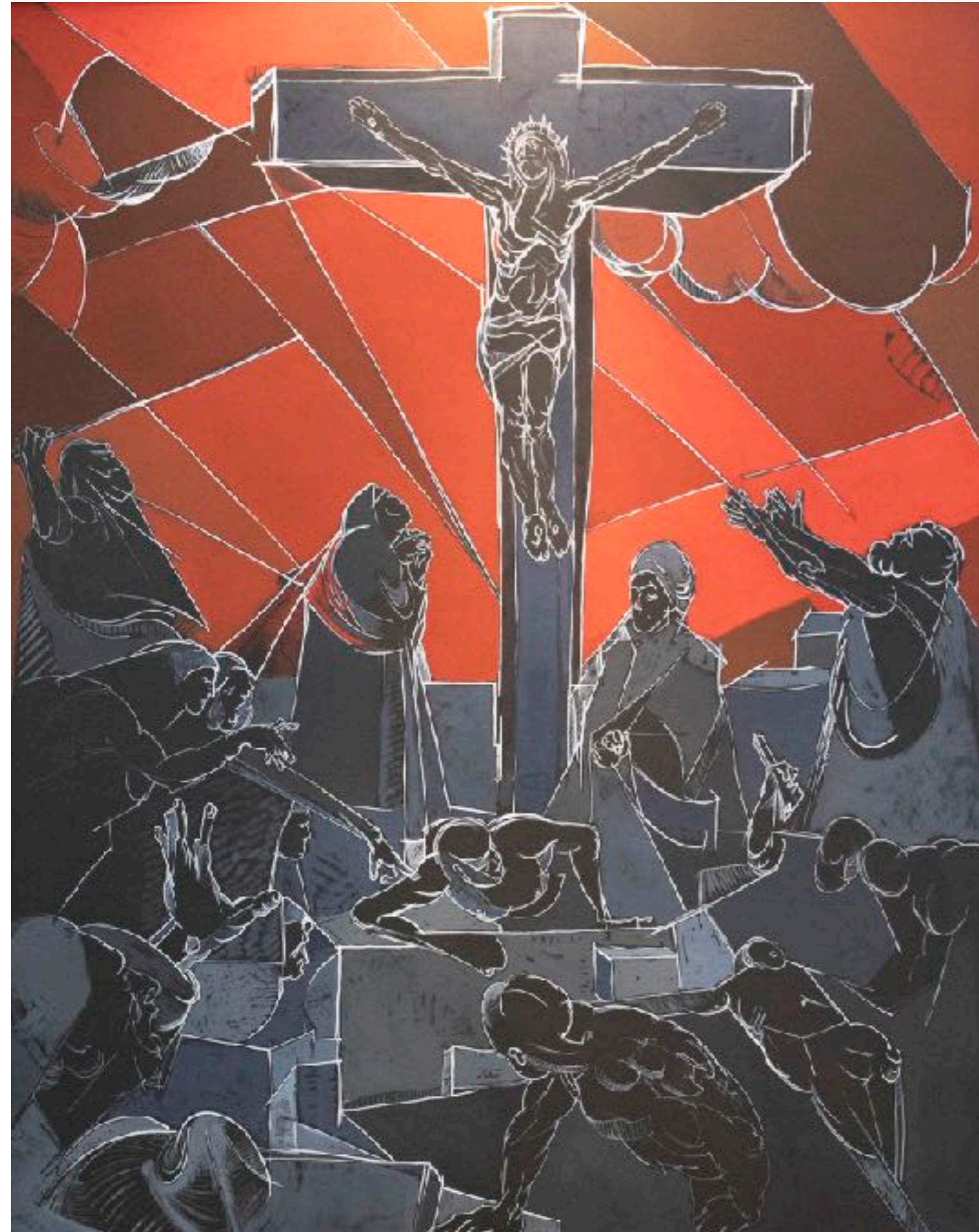
RESEARCH METHODS

This report aims to highlight the responses gained from viewers who interacted with 'Journey to the Cross' during the period of the exhibition and to offer insight to aid evaluation of the impact that the Stations of the Cross Exhibition had upon members of the public visiting.

Data has been collected from visitors narrative responses gathered from written comments given immediately after viewing.

Narratives were gathered every day for the full duration of the exhibition period.

Further data has been gathered by visitor services in the duration time of the exhibition. The data is from a random sample population of visitors who have chosen to provide written responses in a comments book positioned upon exit of the exhibition area.



FINDINGS

For the duration of the exhibition (between 5th March and 23rd April 2019) visitor numbers recorded upon entry to the Cathedral were 12,919 - of this figure the number of Adult Visitors were 11,361 Child Visitors 1,067 Prayer Visitors 491 - Quantitative data provided by Lichfield Cathedral Visitor Services) This is an approximate figure for the amount of people who were ticketed on entry and would have walked through the Cathedral and interacted with the exhibition area, the approximate figure for those who entered and were un-ticketed (before and after visitor services ticket desk closes at 5pm) is unknown.

Qualitative data analysis of the narrative responses collected during the exhibition have shown the following consistent themes:

- 1) Expression of emotion
- 2) Expression of religious / spiritual understanding
- 3) Comments about the artist and the physical depictions of the artworks.

1) Responses were found showing expression of emotions and feelings provoked from the exhibition, here are some examples of comments given:

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'So sensitive and real, one can breath more deeply spending time with these pieces.' L. Taylor, Northumberland.

'Stunning art, the 14th picture 'When it feels that all hope has gone' made me cry. Peter Walker has captured the emotions.'

'haunting, insightful, and beautiful all at once.' Eleanor Rose

'Amazing and thought provoking.'

'Very moving.'

'Stunningly beautiful and full of meaning.'

'So very moving and evocative revealing so much.'

'Very eye opening, makes you emotional hearing the stories.'

'A very powerful and thought provoking walk through the journeys to the cross - thank you.'

'Excellent portrayal of pain and hurt.'

'I found it very emotional but amazing.'

'When all hope has gone all we have left is soul and heart, be generous with both and love will conquer all.'

2) Responses found connecting with the Stations of the Cross story from a spiritual and religious level of understanding:

'Wonderful, great opportunity to reflect and give thanks to God that he loved us he sent his only son to die for us to be reconciled to him, praise the lord.'

'Very moving and reflective, I can correlate it to experience I have encountered and challenge my own actions and beliefs in the light of this.' Charlotte, Derby.

'This exhibition has helped me to see see behind the words. Thank you.'

'An amazing way of interpreting these events.'

'Beautiful, profound, moving, a reminder of such an important time of year as Christians - remembering the pain and suffering before the glorious resurrection and the empty tomb - Jesus is risen Hallelujah! Thank you for the wonderful art work.'

'To treat others Kindly and be understanding of the suffers some face.'

'He gave us so much for us to go on our journey of life.'

'Moving and emotive images of the supreme sacrifice.'

'An Inspiring and moving meditation on the passion. Beautiful in its simplicity yet complex meaning. Thank you.' C. Whitney.

'Beautiful, I'm breath taken by all the symbolisations to God and for what our father has done for us.'

'Very Spiritually up-lifting.'

'Thank you for helping me to remember what Jesus went through to give me eternal life and joy.'

3) Responses found commenting on the artist and/or the physical artwork itself:

'Really amazing it is so refreshing to see contemporary artworks in this kind of setting, thank you'

'Such powerful images, great use of multimedia, much appreciated and would recommend to others.' Rev. G Kayla

'Striking use of colour to re depict la via dolorosa - most interesting.'

'An interesting and expressive group of the artists work - showing creativity and humbleness through his work.' Pat and Angie, Cannock

'It was so lovely to see the artists faith channeled through their art, it was beautiful'

'Great to see it being depicted in contemporary art.'

'Wonderful work beautifully crafted and atmospheric especially the 'Flagellation' T.Saunders, Taunton

'A Very Intense and captivating exhibition. Peter Walker has captured the emotions and put it across to a varied audience.'
Fashion course, south staffs college.

'A Wonderful art installation yet again another great gift by the Cathedral thank you.'

'We are so fortunate in Lichfield to have Peter Walker as artist in residence. I very much appreciated his artistic style and the message it conveys. Thank you. AC

'Excellent information and beautifully displayed by the artist.'

'Moments of the suffering and crucifixion brilliantly and beautifully depicted in the artists work. Many thanks.'

'One of the most beautiful Stations of the Cross I have ever seen. Thank you'



EXAMPLE OF OUTREACH AS SCHOOL INSPIRED BY JOURNEY TO THE CROSS EXHIBITION

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Post Exhibition it was discovered that the following response was posted online showing reactions from St Dominics Primary school whose Year 9 class had visited the Journey to The Cross Exhibition and wished to share their experience after being inspired to create their own versions of the artworks:

“On Thursday, Mrs Cook, Miss Jovanovic and Year 9 students visited Lichfield Cathedral in order to observe and sketch a new collection of paintings by the artist in residence, Peter Walker.

Walker has only recently completed his pieces, collectively entitled: Journey to the Cross; they will be displayed in the cathedral throughout Lent.

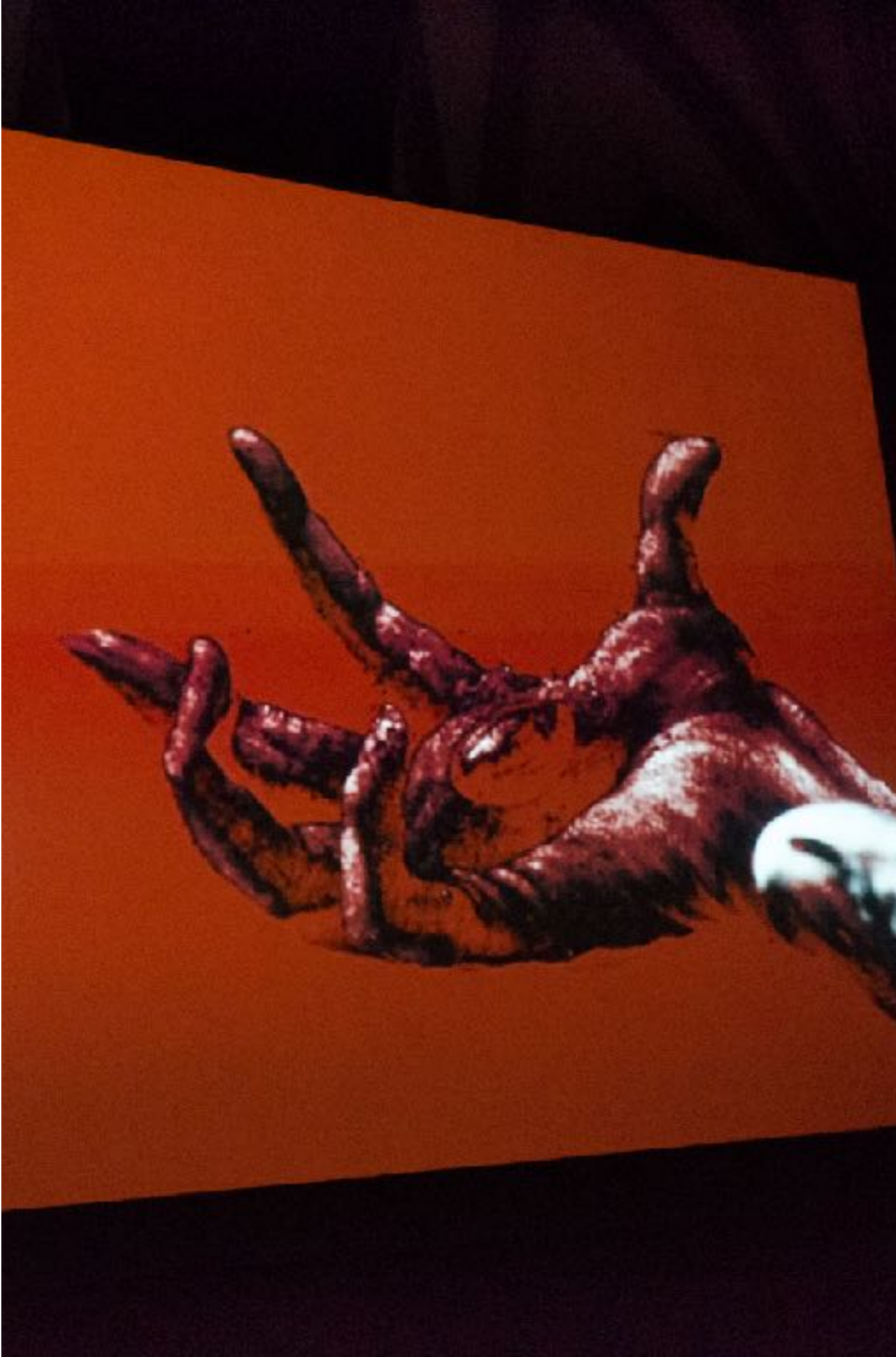
Students worked silently and industriously in this breath-taking space – accompanied by sacred music and the nodding interest and approval of other visitors. Well done Year 9, you behaved impeccably and did St Dominic’s proud.

The pieces were quite varied in style: some more abstract than others, some quite angular, some softer; however, all from the same palette and all the work of an artist keen to express the turmoil of emotions and the brutality of the passion – there was plenty there to inspire.

Before returning home students and staff walked around the charming cathedral close, in the glorious spring sunshine, and then picnicked in the park.

The students finished pieces of work will be on display in Priory Hall on the last afternoon of term, at our Stations of the Cross service.”





CONCLUSION

Findings show highly emotive responses from viewers who have made connections with the artwork on display both physically and viscerally as well as providing an opportunity to make connections with the liturgical story, this has been seen through the responses collected which show reference to religious belief being acknowledged.

Responses also show expression of contemplation from both religious viewpoints and from the perspective of an artistic stance suggestive of new angles and paths of reflection. Findings suggest this contemporary depiction of the Stations of the Cross was understood with responses identifying that concepts were appreciated by viewers as a new interpretation of the story from a visual viewpoint enabling engagement with the liturgical meaning.

Therefore this suggests that the intentions and aims were met in terms of attracting members of the public to engage with the Stations of the Cross in an accessible way for new audiences to connect with the story of Christ's journey to the Cross, meeting both artists requirements and liturgical requirements of the Cathedral.



With thanks to Lichfield Cathedral, Canon Pat Hawkins, Simon Warburton and the Very Rev. Adrian Dorber