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# The Russell Chantry

Lothar Götz /  
Duncan Grant

13th February–29th May 2016  
The Collection, Lincoln

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In 1953 Duncan Grant was commissioned to decorate Lincoln Cathedral's Russell Chantry with a set of murals depicting St. Blaise, the patron saint of wool workers.

The mural unveiled in 1959 remained private for a number of years, possibly because Duncan Grant chose to put a little too much of his own life onto the walls. It was reopened for public view after restoration in 1990. The murals were painted at a time in British art history when mural painting was far more likely to occur on secular or municipal buildings, and this is one reason why Grant's chapel murals are a rarity.

In 2016 The Collection invited Lothar Götz to produce a new mural inside a 1:1 scale reproduction of this chapel. The exhibition included a number of Duncan Grant's preparatory studies for his murals and examples of other artworks made in response to sacred spaces and spirituality from Lothar Götz, alongside highlights from the Methodist Art Collection.

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## Duncan Grant's murals in the Russell Chantry

Linda Tilbury

To step down into the little chapel at the far end of Lincoln Cathedral, dedicated to St. Blaise, patron saint of the wool industry, is to enter a most surprising space. Here warm-toned, almost life-size figures in rural or urban settings surround us closely, lit by the glass in the south wall. The murals give an almost timeless impression, as the figures are dressed in a simple, vaguely medieval style, and the striking and energetic figure of the youthful Good Shepherd on the east wall is far removed from the traditional, medieval image of Christ.

The unusual commission for these murals came through an advertisement placed in *The Times* in May 1952 by the Trustees of the Edwin Austin Abbey Fund for Mural Paintings in Great Britain (to include churches), a newly established fund set up by Abbey's widow, and which still operates. Among the Trustees at this time was the elderly Vanessa Bell, who in 1943, with Duncan Grant, had decorated the entire interior of the little church at Berwick, near their home in Sussex, another rare commission. Her presence on the Trustees may have influenced the choice of Duncan Grant as the artist.

The Lincoln Commission came at a good time for artist and Cathedral. The Cathedral needed a brightening boost after the austerities of the War years, while Duncan Grant's work was no longer in such demand as it once was. The Dean, Colin Dunlop, knew of the Berwick church murals, and he would have responded to the opportunity to have a modest chapel refurbished. The negotiations, choice of painter and approval of designs took time, as did difficulties with repair work on the chapel roof. Even today, after the careful conservation and cleaning done in 1990, the water stain which appeared even before the murals were unveiled is still visible on the east wall, as is the knife-cut along the low wall under the tomb, made when a carpet was laid for a period during the 1980's.

Official bodies such as the Royal Commission for Fine Art had to be consulted. It must have been a frustrating period; even late into the work on the murals, alterations were suggested and complied with by Grant. It was decided that the east wall would show *The Good Shepherd* surrounded by earthly shepherds and their flocks, and scenes of sheep shearing, while the west wall would be concerned with the export of the wool in bales from Brayford Pool, with the view up Steep Hill to the cathedral.

St. Blaise would appear in a roundel above the door, surveying the scene. Grant worked on the murals between 1953 and their unveiling in 1959, when he was in his mid-seventies.

The fact that there were so many delays before the murals were completed may account for later misgivings about their content, which caused the closure of the chapel only a few years after the unveiling. The chapel was used for many years as a useful storage space with cupboards against the walls, then as a changing room for the servers at services, and later as a heated meeting room for a chaplain. This led to damage to the surface of the murals and the subsequent cleaning and conservation of the chapel in 1990. Since then it has been open and used regularly for services and attracts great interest from young and old alike.

In 1911 Grant, then in his twenties, along with fellow artists, was asked to brighten the walls of the dining room at London Polytechnic, and one of his first large panels, "Bathers" can still be seen in Tate Britain. His ability to visualise the decoration of an expanse of wall was to lead later to commissions for Opera and Ballet designs, as well as domestic interiors.

He was lucky in his connections, for his aunt, Lady Strachey, had noticed his early interest in drawing and encouraged him. He studied in London and Paris and travelled to Italy where he absorbed the frescoes

of Masaccio and Piero della Francesca, and other great painters such as Raphael and Signorelli. Although he claimed later to know little about Christianity, there is no doubt about these early influences on his later work. Early images from the catacombs of Rome and churches in Ravenna, for example, were the inspiration for The Good Shepherd in the Lincoln murals, and we know from the very many studies that Duncan Grant made for it that he took great pains to achieve this central figure.

For a period Grant “dabbled” in abstract painting, the most notable example being the extraordinary fourteen foot long Scroll he designed in 1913, to be accompanied by music and viewed through an aperture as it slowly unrolled. Grant was once asked why he had not pursued this exploration into pure abstraction— his response was that none of his friends seemed interested in it and so he presumed it would not have a lasting value. The opinions of his older friends in the Bloomsbury Group seem to have mattered to Grant, although theirs was a largely literary world. Even so, it is unlikely that Grant, with his lively response to the world around him, would have moved further into abstraction; His love of landscape, of domestic interiors, of his friends and of an imaginative world of myth and movement would remain his focus all his life.

Duncan Grant once described Lincoln as “a gloriously happy church”, and the pleasure he took in this commission is evident in the enormous number of preparatory studies he made for the murals, some of which are still coming to light in the archives at Charleston Farmhouse in Sussex. His studio there must have been a busy scene as early charcoal sketches progressed to watercolour and then fully realised oil studies.

Various members of his family, friends and neighbours were posed as figures of shepherds, sailors and waiting women, as well as for a tallyman and the saint himself.

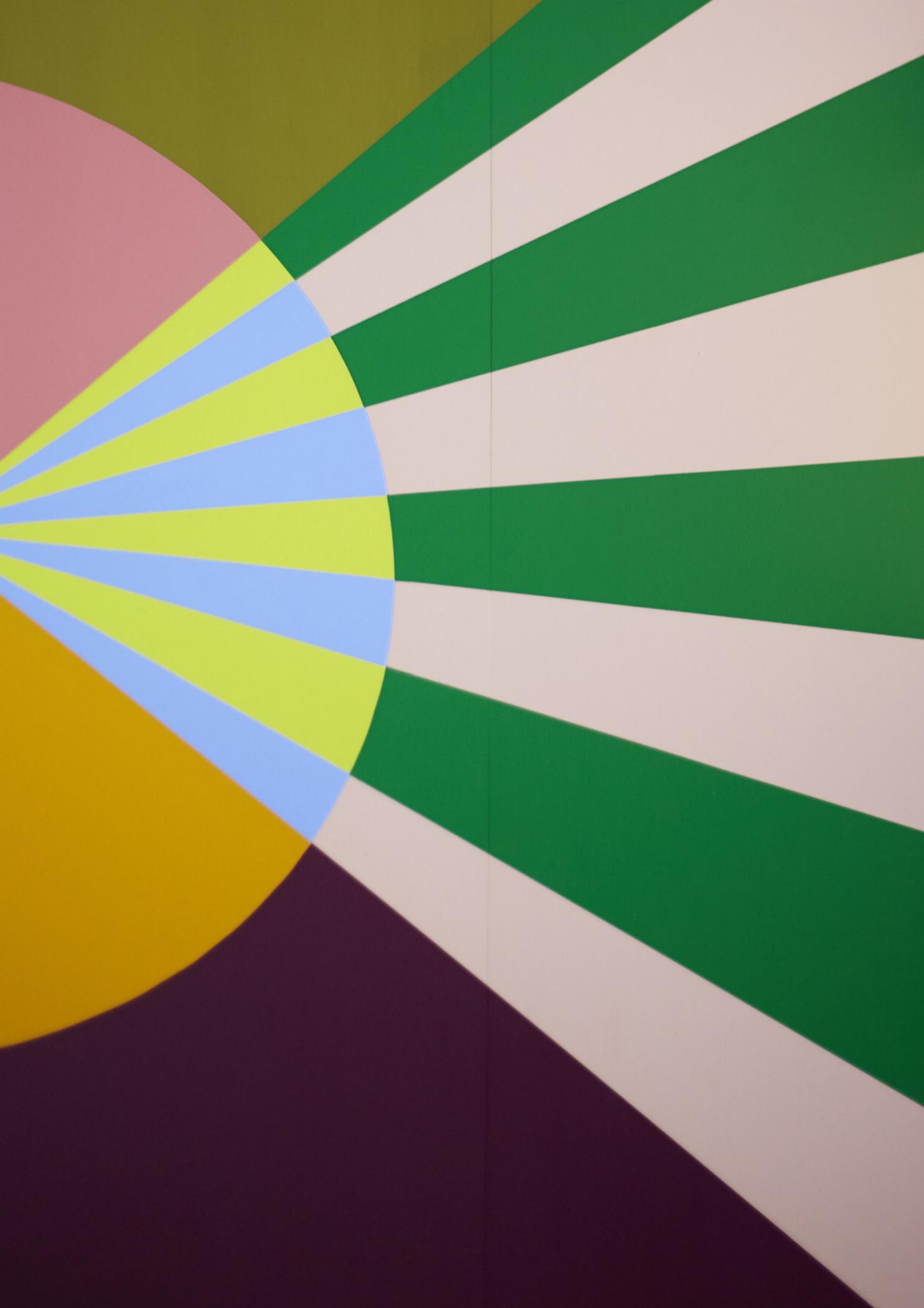
He lived surrounded by sheep at Charleston, and the pond and garden there provided inspiration for the mallard, butterflies and wagtails which fly across the tomb wall of the chapel.

Grant used large easels, lent by Glyndebourne, on which to attach sheets of paper and apply cut-outs of figures and animals, to decide on placing and spacing before the work could be transferred to the panels. He also painted a mock-up of the predella panel over the altar to judge scale and tone.

The final work was painted in oil on fibrous plaster-boards, which gives to the oils an impression of the chalky surface of fresco. Once the panels arrived in Lincoln in the summer of 1956 they were attached to the walls on battens over the following two years. Duncan Grant and Vanessa Bell attended the unveiling in July 1959, when they stayed as usual in the White Hart Hotel. Vanessa died two years later, while Grant was to live to ripe old age, still travelling and painting and enjoying exhibitions, often with his friend Paul Roche, the model for The Good Shepherd.

Lincoln Cathedral is fortunate to have this large, late example of Grant’s decorative work. Continued interest in the Bloomsbury Group seems likely to make these murals of enduring fascination, while the excellent book by Edward Mayor, to commemorate the re-opening of the chapel, together with the impressive number of studies for the murals now owned by The Collection, should also ensure the chapel is unlikely ever again to suffer neglect. Whatever attitudes prevailed during the over twenty years of its closure have since given way to a more open and affectionate view of this chapel and its decorations.





## Extramural: Public Art in Britain 1951–2016

Ian Waites

On the morning of Monday 11 January 2016, and very soon after the news emerged that David Bowie had died, a public mural of him in Brixton, South London immediately became an impromptu shrine for those who wanted to commemorate the life and music of the iconic pop star. The mural is tucked away on a gable-end wall down a short, pedestrianised street off Brixton Hill Road, near where Bowie was born on Stansfield Road in 1947. As the day progressed, flowers and tributes began to pile up at the foot of the mural, which depicts an image of Bowie taken from the cover of his 1973 album, *Aladdin Sane*. The mural was painted by Australian street artist James Cochran, aka Jimmy C, in 2013, and it soon became the focus of fans' grief, as crowds of men and women, often made up with that iconic lightning strip across their face, gathered to pay their respects.

This is perhaps but one function of public art, where a mural might become a visual medium for the expression of mourning or, for instance, heightened local or communal feeling. Arguably, art is at its best when it is fully public: Outside in a town square, or on a gable end of a terrace of housing, free from the confines of a white space, or even a state bedroom in a National Trust country pile. Brian Eno once said that art is 'everything you don't have to do'. Equally, public art is everything you don't have to notice, and you do not have to choose to see it. The people of Brixton would have walked past the Bowie mural every day, maybe glancing at it as they went, a small visual detail to brighten up the day. Some might not have taken any notice of it at all. Even so, it would most probably be missed if it were painted over, or if the building itself was demolished.

Bowie was a 'baby boomer', born just two years after the end of the Second World War, and so he grew up during a post-war era when the notion of taking art to the public blossomed as part of a new spirit of social democracy, of progress, planning and renewal. It was this spirit which, as we shall see, also manifested itself in Lincoln in 1953, when the Cathedral commissioned Duncan Grant to decorate the Russell Chantry with a set of murals depicting St. Blaise, the patron saint of wool workers – and which of course is now the inspiration for Lothar Götz's new set of murals created within a 1:1 scale reproduction of the chapel at The Collection, Lincoln.

Grant's commission followed the significant boost given to public mural-making in 1951 by the Festival of Britain, where around 100 murals were shown at the South Bank Exhibition site alone. This stimulated both critical and local government interest, and it encouraged many artists to turn their eye to the creation of public murals, and to the use of a wide range of materials: Ceramics, fibreglass, wood and concrete, as well as paint. Between 1951 and 1980, at least one thousand murals were created across the country, the majority being civic commissions for new schools, civic buildings, new town squares and pedestrian subways. They were intended to help bring the public realm back to life as local authorities began to repair and rebuild blitzed towns and cities, and develop new towns and new council housing estates. In turn, and in this brave new world of culture for all, artists themselves made these murals with a view to fostering shared, public experiences of creativity, of beauty, and a sense of hope for the future.

Although the post-war period was to see society become increasingly secular in nature, the church nevertheless played an active and central role in this flowering of post-war public art. Town planning at this time often involved an adoption of the European Modernist concept of the 'stadtkrone', or 'city crown', where a New Town or new council estate would have a modern architectural set-piece that was intended to play a central role in the development of a newly created parish or neighbourhood. More often

than not, this would be in the form of a new church, designed in the modern manner, and which would also include new decorative artworks.

In Lincoln for instance, the most notable example is Sam Scorer and Hajnal Konyi's parish church of St. John the Baptist (1963), which is the central feature of the Ermine Estate. The church is justly noted for its impressive reinforced concrete hyperbolic paraboloid roof, but it is also has a magnificent East window by Keith New (who was also responsible for the stained glass windows at Coventry Cathedral) which, as one commentator at the time put it, was intended to "illuminate the whole building ... filling the church with colour, light and mystery".

The abstract composition of New's window was meant to present the Ermine estate community with the 'Revelation of God's plan for man's redemption'. Similar lessons also occur in what can be considered as the earliest examples of public mural art in this country, and which were also found in local churches: Medieval 'Doom' paintings. These murals depicted Christ's Last Judgment, and they were used by the early medieval Church as a daily visual reminder to worshippers of their immortality and of the fate that would meet them if they sinned. Doom paintings are most commonly found on the wall of the Chancel arch, so that they would be constantly visible to the congregation as they faced the altar during services. Medieval lessons of the 'end time' aside, the situation of these murals also meant that the scene had to be composed around the arch itself, and typically with Christ in judgment at its apex.

So another defining characteristic of public mural art is that the picture needs to be harmoniously accommodated into the architectural elements of the allotted space. This is certainly the case with Duncan Grant's decorations for the Russell Chantry, where the wide, clear expanse of the chapel's East wall is dominated by the depiction of Christ as the Good Shepherd. A vignette of St. Blaise, the patron saint of wool workers, appears in a roundel which sits neatly above the door to the Chantry in the North wall, while the West wall is covered with a scene of Lincoln, looking over the Brayford Pool and up to the Cathedral (a view favoured by many of the great early-nineteenth century British landscape painters, such as JMW Turner and Peter DeWint).

In 1953, Grant was an establishment artist: he had the patronage of Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother and he had already enjoyed his first major retrospective at the Tate Gallery earlier that year. The Russell Chantry murals are all typically painted in his brightly coloured, figurative Post-Impressionist style. By this time however, his style was already considered to be somewhat outdated. Most public art in the post-war period, sacred and secular, tended towards a more contemporary, semi-abstract, expressionist manner. For instance, Graham Sutherland's tapestry, 'Christ in Glory in the Tetramorph', designed between 1954 and 1957 for Basil Spence's Coventry Cathedral. Nevertheless, after Grant's murals were officially unveiled on Saturday June 7 1959, an article in the following Monday's edition of the Lincolnshire Echo seemed content with their 'satisfactorily decorative effect – a work of colour and charm'.

The article tells us that the murals were unveiled by the then Vice Chancellor of Nottingham University, Mr BL Hallward, who apparently enlivened the proceedings with typical post-war chirpiness by stating that 'fashions in art change only little less frequently than women's hats.' 'Nevertheless', he continued, in perhaps a more necessarily serious vein, with Grant's murals 'a creative work of art remained.' As the historian of post-war Britain, David Kynaston, has pointed out, local press coverage of even relatively minor new developments in this modern age generally tended to be positive, 'seldom questioning the need to embrace the tide of

modernity'. The Echo certainly felt that it had to add a note of solemnity to the unveiling of the murals by calling the article 'Creative Art, Undying', but it also clearly reflected the general post-war mood of consensus when it stressed the 'need to commission mural paintings in public buildings to which the public have access.'

The creation of public art continued through the 1960s and into the 1970s, but that mood of consensus, and of widening social democracy, rapidly began to dissipate during the Thatcherite period of privatisation of the 1980s and early 1990s. The final flowering of public art in the post-war period came in the 1980s, with the creation for instance of a series of murals in Brixton following the riots there in 1981, and of others carried out in locations across London in 1983, as part of the Greater London Council's 'Peace Year'. Since then however, many of those murals have disappeared or have become damaged. Indeed, all post-war public art today is in jeopardy – so much so that in January 2016, Historic England started a campaign which asked the public to help record and save what it described as 'the forgotten riches of our national outdoor art collection.'

How successful this will be in a society where an interest in the public realm has given way to atomized, individualistic modes of living is debatable. Much of our post-war Modernist heritage in general is, in any case, increasingly under threat from the private redevelopment and demolition of former public buildings, council estates and open spaces, to the point where public space itself is becoming commodified and controlled privately.

Thankfully however, a glimmer of that post-war 'art for all' spirit remains today. Much of Lothar Götz's work – his 2006 murals for the concourse of the Piccadilly tube station for example – is in the best tradition of public art in its intention to enrich our everyday lives and, essentially, in how it engages with public places and space.

Jimmy C's 2013 Brixton mural of David Bowie clearly fits in with that tradition too. The mural is also painted in a style that the artist describes as 'aerosol pointillism', which, in this present context, also provides a happy allusion to the style of some of the Post-Impressionist painters so revered by Duncan Grant and the Bloomsbury Group. Another defining characteristic of Post-Impressionism was of course the exuberant use of bright colour. In these grey days of enforced post-public austerity, when it appears that art is actually being taken away from ordinary people, it is good that we at least have colour, and lots of it, in the public murals of Duncan Grant and Lothar Götz.









## Thoughts on mural painting, fantasy and reality

### An interview with the artist in his London studio by Simon Martin, January 2016

#### **What were your first thoughts about the Duncan Grant mural in the Chantry Chapel?**

I saw the murals for the first time just after I graduated from the Royal College of Art in 1998. I visited with the artist George Shaw (we had studied together) as he took me with his girlfriend Kathryn to see it in 1999. The first thing that struck me was the yellow – rather than the figures. My first impression was to find the yellow really special, something different. I always had this memory of a yellow mural. And, I was gobsmacked by the obvious homoerotic context.

Immediately when I'm in there, I'm transformed. The architecture of the Cathedral and the history, and the way the church treated the chapel (closing it to the public for several decades) – I thought about that as well.

#### **How do you set about working on a site-specific commission?**

With site-specific commissions there is always a brief, which I try to ignore if possible, and to just work with it and see if there is a problem. The site-specific work developed out of my interest in spaces and architecture – architecture as form and the social activity in the space. For a while I found it difficult to work on canvas or support – it's probably a character thing as my brain starts working when I can respond to something – people, a story, a book, a space. Working on canvas I found too difficult. The surface is too soft. That's why I like working on a wall. Painting on canvas means much more to do with 'painting' whereas I see my practice as in between. I would question myself: 'am I a painter, or not', and in the end I gave up and said 'yes I am'. Instead of canvas I started to work on wood. The hard surface is beautiful to draw on...

For me, an important aspect was that the work does not start when I begin painting, but before, when I am travelling to the space – and I try to take in as much information as I can but my own story also starts. There can be things from art history – but also things from daily life that influence what I am doing. The work doesn't end where the paint ends, but is about the whole space. It is something performative – for example where there is a room and I paint a wall pink. The person/viewer becomes part of the work – an interaction between the viewer and the work.

Site-specific works often work with the memory. You have an eye in the back of the head as well. When you see an orange on one wall and then green on the other, even if you've only seen it for a second it's in your brain. When something is site specific it is so different from looking at painting that you can see in one go. You have to walk around. It's not an image. Through that the viewer becomes an integral part of the whole work because it's not possible without that.

#### **How about the particular context of the Lincoln mural?**

I started to make sketches... spending a lot of time wandering around. Then I made rough sketches, without using colour. The process is not an active design process, but an emptying out of the head where I try to make a connection with the space, where I become like a medium. Very often I get first ideas and then dismiss them again. Usually I leave and then don't know what I'll do and get a moment of despair. Often an idea comes later when I look at my sketches. I need time, distance. A train journey, a day or two... I then start to draw. Working with pencils, following up ideas – most of which get chucked away. After I made the decision on what to do, I went to my Berlin studio for a week, which is



very clean - the opposite of here - and I worked there and at the end I felt ready to start.

Art has the freedom to be completely useless. You probably need a certain selfishness. David Bowie said that all his best work was when he was completely in the work being selfish. When you're in the studio being a bit crazy, after that period, the two things come together. You do not have that strange discrepancy when you work on a painting or drawing. These commissions get their own life, meeting people, traveling there.

**How do you feel about responding to the sacred setting within a cathedral?**

You design something and solve problems with public art commissions. When you respond to something you have a responsibility - you are not entirely neutral. You have to design something that has to function. There is a social use that is fixed to something that is very different to a gallery. In a cathedral people come in to pray and you have to take that into account.

In churches you look at art differently from a normal space. It feels like blasphemy to judge whether it is a good painting. You cannot judge it like an art piece in a gallery. I find Duncan Grant's mural totally intriguing because it is in a religious setting. How would you look at these paintings outside of that? I've never worked in a religious space before. It's not 'neutral'. I imagine Duncan Grant struggling with it. With a public altarpiece as an artist you make different judgements.

**How do you relate to the Christian context?**

In Lincoln there is the history and baggage of the Cathedral as architecture, the chapel, and also the spiritual. What does it do to it when a space is sanctified? When at Lincoln - I was there for 3 or 4 days and they would have masses - it brought out strong feelings - on the one hand I was drawn to it and on the other revolted. I realised I was in a spiritual space... I had a Catholic upbringing and grew up very religious. I still pay taxes in Germany to the Church. I had wanted to become a priest. But when I was 18 or 19 I started to question it. I went to a monastery to pray, and had an extreme week questioning it.

When I was growing up in Germany I loved the monasteries - the idea of these amazing spaces. As a child I was obsessed with the idea of the *closure* - the area only monks or nuns could visit - the idea of a space taken away from reality. The religious was always part of my life. I still find monasteries fascinating, but [as a gay man] got completely upset with the church about homophobia. I had to realise that for my own personality the religious is an important part that I can't deny.

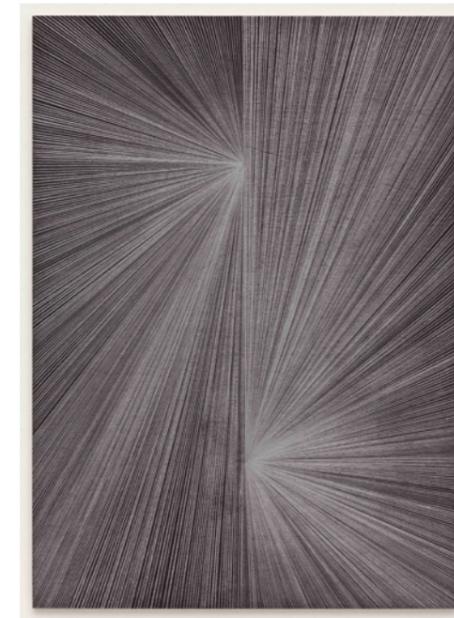
**Did the murals in Rococo Bavarian churches like Die Wieskirche have any impact on you?**

The local church in Günzburg (the *Frauenkirche*), where I had Holy Communion, was built by the same architect, called Dominikus Zimmermann. It was the testing out for his masterwork at *Wieskirche*. The spaces of Baroque churches had quite a big influence on me: I grew up in a narrow-minded environment and architecture was a way out of that. I grew up in a provincial, quite homophobic environment. As a child I was obsessed with green eye shadow, escaping through makeup. Transforming as a child was an escape - I didn't realise as a child what that meant.

In Günzburg there were wall paintings that were quite tropical, painted in a way with illusionary space, which as a child you could zoom

Duncan Grant, *The Russell Chantry*, 1953

Lothar Götz, *The Russell Chantry*, 2016



Lothar Götz, *House for Karl-Heinz Adler*, 2014

yourself into. Baroque paintings are all illusionary, a bit fake and theatrical - but it's reality in that moment. It's like being transformed into some sort of cloud of space that's real. Really amazing *trompe l'œil*...

As a student I was always saying I hated Baroque because I loved the Bauhaus, until one of my painting tutors said I was a Baroque soul. Only later I understood what he meant - dealing with painting as a different kind of space - doing wall paintings in spaces adds a different kind of space - these layers.

**As an abstract artist, how important is the connection of your work to reality?**

Abstract works for me are so much more real than so many realist paintings. For me, abstraction and reality belong together - I always had problems when people divide these two things. People are inspired, looking at work, making work - it's kind of a circle. On the one hand you respond to something that is real, and then in the studio something completely abstract, and then bring them together... If you have a staircase that is completely white and you add colour, it doesn't change the function but it does completely change our experience going up and down the stairs.

I am not interested in abstraction as a theory model. I'm not dogmatic about it. I get irritated when it is being fitted into a set of rules. I don't see my work as opposed to figurative art. It's the same thing with music - you respond to a more abstract quality. For me it is completely real. With Duncan Grant there are certain details I really like to look at and think: 'what do we have in common?'

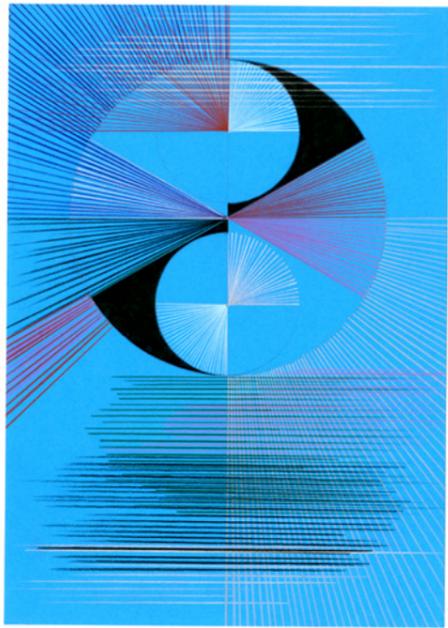
**Does music have a particular resonance for you as an abstract artist, like it did for artists such as Kandinsky and Klee?**

It was quite important. I loved Bach. I went to a specific school for artists and musicians. I loved to play the piano and had lessons in piano and flute for at least ten years from around the age of seven. I did lots of painting compositions after music when I was a student. Classical music was quite important, particularly as a teenager, and especially Handel... Music can transport you into an abstract space. Haydn, Mozart it is more open. It is a similar way of thinking: dismantling reality and putting it together in your own way.

**Your comments suggest that the imagination is just as important to your work as the physical reality of the architecture to which you have to respond?**

As a child I created big villas. I was always interested in architecture, in the private and domestic space. I always enjoyed maps and ground plans - they give you the freedom to imagine what it could be. I looked at thousands of architectural plans as a child, but for me it was the starting point for a fantasy. For a long time architecture inspired me more than art. When I get really excited by space it's with the buildings that have the dimensions of a private house. I see a house as an extension for our body, nearly a portrait of someone. It's an extended body. The kind of architecture you grow up with.

I grew up in a little market town and probably knew every building site on the town. I was very much a loner. I played with dolls and imagined all these spaces for them. At the time they were building all these 1970s bungalows. These were all architect-designed - different to a Barrett home in England: architect-designed modernist spaces. This moment of imagining things is one of the main reasons I became an



Lothar Götz, *Mirror blue*, 2015

artist in that I was never really interested in reality. When you get your head into a book you create a different reality. There was one house I looked at all the time. I was fascinated by the ground plan, and after it was finished I went with my parents to see it, but nearly cried as the reality was so disappointing. I later did a project called 'If I had grown up elsewhere'.

The finishing of something as an architect did not interest me. It's the point where it is not ready. With the wall paintings I try to leave something open. In Lincoln it will appear like a theatrical set. I wanted to shift the way we perceive the space and take it away from function.

**You mentioned your love of the Bauhaus, what was it about it that particularly appealed?**

Coming from Bavaria I responded to the light and very specific conditions in landscape when growing up... Kandinsky and the whole Bauhaus thing was probably the biggest influence for me. The Bauhaus was the first art movement that influenced me as a student, after my childhood interest in architecture and plans. There are links to the ground plans of imagined houses I did as a child. When a student in Aachen I was not a painterly painter – I was always on the edge with design, theatre, and architecture. In my first degree I did a bit of everything. And the Bauhaus I felt the most in common with – I always like the traditional world of *Gestaltung* (design). The Bauhaus was always good breaking down categories – designers as theatre people and I like the whole political social aspect – beautiful simple mass production. I always responded very much to colour. As a student I did my dissertation in art history on Oskar Schlemmer's *Triadic Ballet*. I couldn't decide the way I wanted to go – I would go more to the theatre than to the museum. At the RCA I started to bring all these elements together and with site-specific projects could combine different interests.

**Did you feel it was important to respond to Duncan Grant's style of painting?**

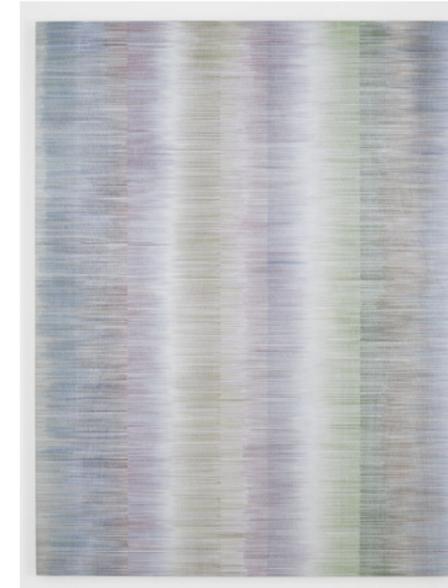
I found it quite overwhelming. It's quite difficult to respond to something quite literal. I mean I'm not painting sheep. Should I respond to the colour, to the spiritual? I gave myself some parameters and then decided to ignore it. I couldn't just paint an abstract shape where a sheep is. With abstract commissions there are a lot of decisions, which would be different in a different context.

I started thinking I had to respond to Grant's aesthetic and the whole baggage of the Bloomsbury Group, asking myself: 'do I have to respond to the way they paint?' The work I do is influenced by that, but more in a very personal way by the things that fascinated me – rather than a historically accurate research. For a long time I wasn't so aware of Duncan Grant. He's not well known in Germany.

If I look at the mural of Duncan Grant – his is figurative and so completely different to me – he was probably struggling with the spiritual aspect. Maybe I responded to my imagination of him. It's a bit like the practice between the drawings and site-specific work – drawings that are 'retreats' for people – where I respond to a film, or a sentence from a novel. I started to make my own story for Duncan Grant.

**And what about Grant's sexuality?**

I do find the fact that the painting is in the Cathedral fascinating. It was difficult to respond just to the work – but also what kind of person Duncan Grant was, his life. It's not historically accurate as an approach.



Lothar Götz, *Untitled*, 2015

IMAGE COURTESY, Andy Keate

The Chantry Chapel mural felt tied to a brief: that it had to include Lincoln. In my eyes it looks like a painting Grant didn't enjoy. I feel Duncan Grant was someone who had a life and this is shown in the Cathedral. Whether you like the work or not is secondary, a different question. I am always on edge, but I think I responded quite a lot to that atmosphere, sitting in the Cathedral.

One thing was probably the way that Duncan Grant used his private life (these controversial figures in the mural)... how he personalised the chapel. He took on the chapel and made it his own space, just as lots of artists did in Renaissance churches. The people in his life that entered into the work... This is where I feel myself completely parallel to Duncan. At a time of homophobia, how do you treat religious themes in your own way? Duncan sneaked things in. I always look in Renaissance churches for things like that...

**As a German how do you relate to the Bloomsbury Group?**

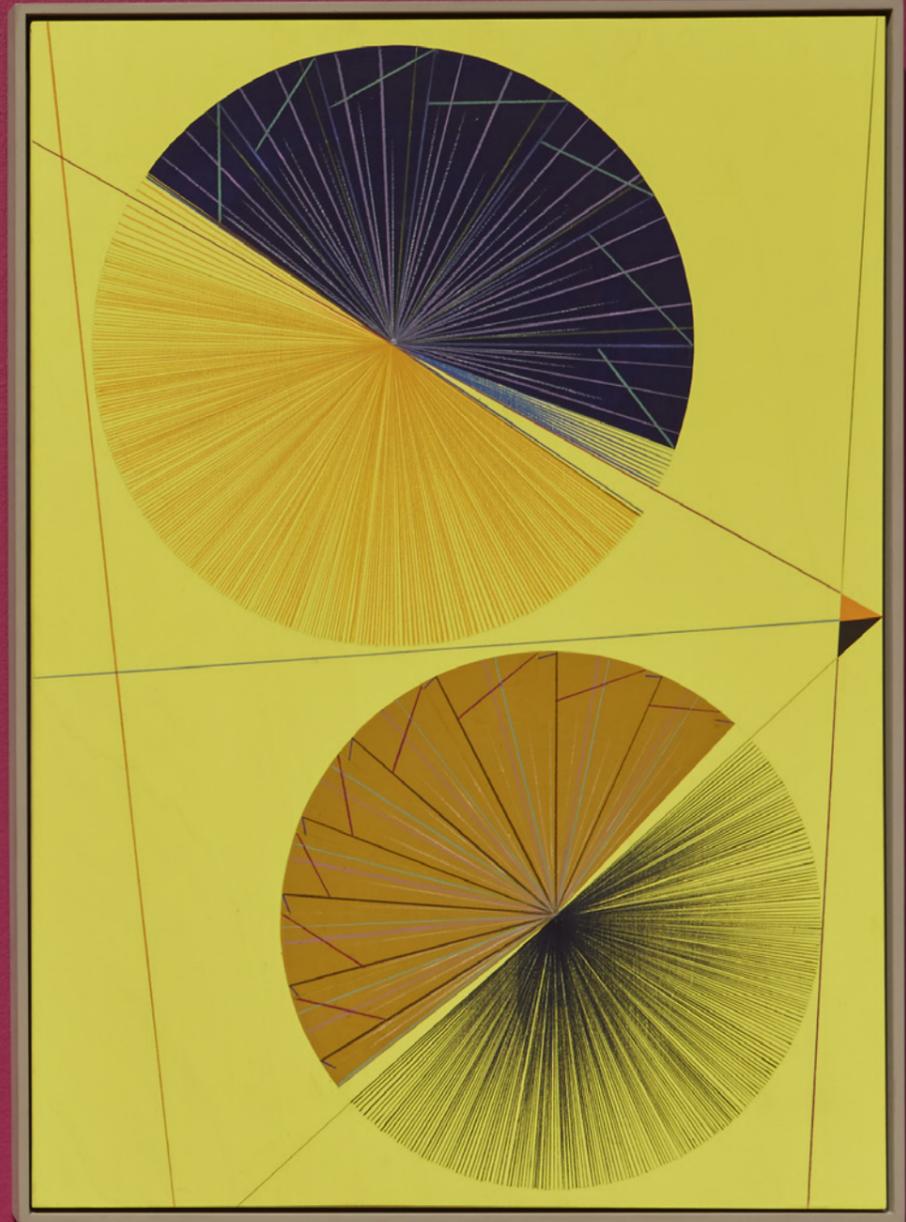
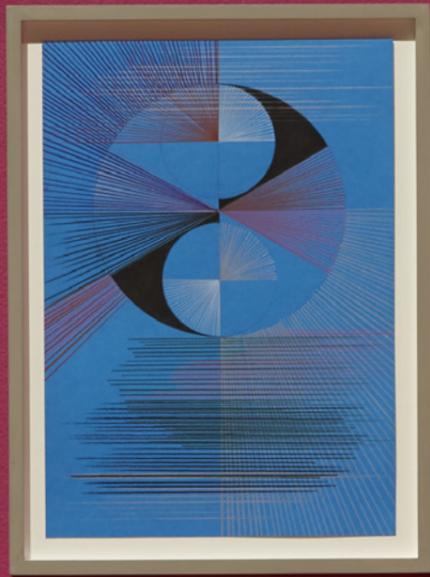
I never had a really close relationship to the idea of the Bohemian life they [Grant, Vanessa Bell, and other members of the Bloomsbury Group such as Roger Fry and Clive Bell] lived at Charleston – something I always thought of as really English, which as a German I thought I couldn't relate to. But at Lincoln I thought of it initially as British art history. It has changed how I feel as an artist here in London, what I am doing. I think I see that whole period of the Bloomsbury Group with different eyes. Before as a German I saw it as foreign – there is a difference in the way that artists dealt with the modern movement from on the continent. They were less rigid. The Bloomsbury Group dealt with Modernism from a much more personal perspective. On the continent the Bauhaus wanted to do away with personal feelings. It was part of the reason the modern movement partly failed – it became a cold style, because the personal was not there.

**Are there other British artists who have had a big influence?**

Ben Nicholson was a big influence. I felt much closer to Nicholson than lots of people from Germany. This probably goes even so far as the question of why I enjoy being an artist in Britain more than in Germany. With Nicholson, it was the form. I came across him in the second year of my first degree. I was drawing all these corners and always trying to make an abstract composition and my tutors said I should look at Ben Nicholson. It wasn't colour, but the geometry and shapes, the drawings that are not abstract that were quite influential. It's so much more playful – so English – in Germany it was often seen as more strategic.

In Düsseldorf my tutor Gerhard Merz tried to rip the personal out of us, because there was the idea that everything had to be the perfect white cube. I was always interested in the imperfection – not the intention to change it, but to start from there and include it into the work.

Simon Martin is Artistic Director of Pallant House Gallery in Chichester, where Lothar Götz will be creating a site-specific mural in Summer 2016.





## Breath in, Breath Out Ashley Gallant

In the recent past I was sitting in a field in Norfolk with a friend. We were watching the sunset and the colour scheme, designed by artist James Turrell, slowly shifting the Palladian architecture of Houghton hall through a cycle of L.A. pinks and yellows.

The impressive technical light set up, falsifying the warm L.A. four o'clock light onto the façade, itself referencing architectural styles from the European continent, seemed a pertinent convergence of times and spaces.

The conversation turned to how art functions, its use. My friend said something that has resonated with me since. 'Art is a breath.'

As a Curator in a public institution, a large part of my relationship to art is with its display and interpretation, I work with art all day and it is a huge part of my life, but a breath? What did this mean?

We are constantly encouraged to discuss art and creativity in terms of its 'use,' its relation to society, health, politics and economics; to force it into the realms of the social sciences or philosophy. Something easily measurable but we all know the emotional or physical response to great art is far more complex than that.

I started to think about breath, or breathing. The process, we inhale an invisible substance, there is a transformation by osmosis, we take oxygen from the air and replace it with carbon dioxide, we breathe out and life is sustained.

Breathing out we create waves that can reflect and bounce from their surroundings. This can create sound, speech, singing, it can communicate.

This all happens almost invisibly unless we are aware enough to pick up on the slight signs, the chest rising, or we place an obstruction in the way such as glass which makes the breath visible.

I then started to consider breathing more esoterically, a breath, or breathing is universal, automatic, when you concentrate on breathing it can be meditative or a sign of trouble.

But in language, to take a breath is to stop, to relax, to focus, to be given life.

When things get too much you are told to take a breather, to calm and focus. A breath of fresh air is a new start, a new way of thinking.

So it struck me what could be more vital, more important than a breath.

This all came back to me when thinking about the work of Lothar Götz.

Much has been written about Lothar's work in relation to his interest in Palladian architecture, porticos, and wall coverings.

One might say there is a connection between Turrell projecting lighting onto the architecture, using its columns and domes and Götz working from architectural spaces, doorways and features to create his colourful painted interventions. Yet for me the real question was how did Lothar's art work, why did it excite me?

I decided to use my own personal understanding of this notion of art as a breath to discuss Lothar Götz's practice.

I know this is rather esoteric and removed from the apparent objectiveness of art history, but for me this more poetic understanding only does more justice to a series of works which bring up pertinent questions for how we relate to art. Using breathing and breath as an analogy allows me to more easily describe the way in which this work functions.

The project we presented to Lothar was that of The Russell Chantry. A small, private chapel located close to the Choir in Lincoln Cathedral. Since 1959 this has had three walls adorned with a Mural by Duncan Grant depicting St. Blaise the Patron Saint of wool workers. We rebuilt a set of this chapel in the gallery and invited Lothar to produce a new mural for this new space. The museum setting highlighting the many readings of the Chantry space being both private and public, sacred and secular. Personally the church and the Gallery have often had the same effect on me.

The cultural importance placed on the spaces create a situation whereby I am made ever more aware of my own mortality. As you walk round both spaces, which are instilled with the expectation of contemplation I instantly become aware of every noise of my shoes, ruffle of my clothing and noise of inhaling and exhaling.

It could be said that both the sacred space of the chapel and the secular space of the gallery/museum inherently have a relationship to the act of breathing. Sacred spaces are covered in images of Jesus on the cross, the ultimate symbol of the final breath, which is then instilled with the story of the resurrection, maybe the most iconic instance of the first breath. But also the sacred space is a space of contrast, between life and death, known and unknowns, sound and silence, inhaling and exhaling. The spaces are either silent or personal, assisting your own inner reflection or filled with singing cantation and oratory, controlled forms of breathing, public displays of spirituality. The Gallery in the same way encourages silent interaction or public oratory, only in recent years has the idea of discussions entered this space.

The inherent activity of the museum is the prevention of decay, the keeping in stasis of objects which once belonged in the world of the living. It can be said that an object in use breathes and lives. Objects in the museum are placed on life support. Their breath is held.

Lothar was very aware of this when approaching the project; he was bought up in a Catholic family and talks of a childhood staring at the baroque ceilings of churches, an experience that has instilled in him a heightened sense of spirituality, and the idea of architectural spaces having connotations beyond our scientific understanding of the world.

Lothar was then taught and influenced by a generation of German post war artists, for who abstraction was the only mode of painting that was untainted by recent German history.

Representation was inextricably linked with notions of acceptable, versus degenerative art during the 3<sup>rd</sup> Reich, who used representation, especially portraiture to project an imagined and troubling future, rather than representing the present.

Artists such as Josef and Anni Albers, and Gerhard Merz, who taught and influenced Lothar in Düsseldorf, were just a few of a wide group of German artists whose abstraction has an inherent relationship to the architectural space and to the body. Artists for whom abstraction was a sharp intake of breath, a gulp for air in comparison to the recent suffocation of the war.

Lothar has a strong affiliation with the approach; he talks of never being interested in representation. At least not in the notion of creating an 'image', although interested in architecture from youth, he never wanted to draw an image of the architecture, or of the space but to present how it made him feel, what a building said, how it breathed. A large traditional building may find its language in a colour or a shape as opposed to a floor plan.

Lothar's work is problematic. They are readily seen as abstract, as in that they do not set out to obviously represent something, but to the artist clearly represent either spaces or characters and personalities.

Many of the wall drawings take as their starting points the architectural space in which they are sited. The wall works often playing off of the architectural features and personality of the space. In this way the works are not abstractions at all, but resoundingly based in and of the world.

This relationship to the space in which the work is sited jars against traditional histories of wall coverings, which either aim to decorate or adorn, magnify or reduce the natural form of the room, or as in representational

mural painting, remove the room altogether to present a different reality entirely.

Lothar in contrast, draws from the space something which is present but unseen, more akin to a spiritual understanding of a space.

So when Lothar started this project he approached it as he has many projects before, he shied away from room plans and architectural models, and was insistent on being in the physical space before he could start to design and work on the mural. In this case, this meant time in the original Chapel.

Over a period of days Lothar sits and 'breathes' in the space, taking in the architectural motifs, the geometries and the inconsistencies. As in eastern spirituality we are taught that we can become enlightened through meditation, something 'other' can become apparent through slowing down and concentrating on the self, often starting with attention to breath. Lothar seems to meditate within these spaces, focusing on the space in and of itself.

Lothar talks of the spaces showing him the colours and shapes that will come to fill them. The Artist breathes in, and in a process close to osmosis Lothar picks up the features of the room and translates them into colours, shapes and patterns. Oxygen becomes dioxides. The particles shift into something completely different but have the ingredients of their original concoction.

The process is internal and ungraspable in logical terms. Even though the works will utilise architectural proportions and details such as lights and electrical fixings, it is less a case of these informing the works, but more Lothar's ability to feel the space, to draw out the invisible patterns and forms the architectural space consists of.

The geometric patterns and shapes he adorns the space with display a part of the room we were unaware of, but was always present.

When a choir enters a space, takes a breath and sings we become aware of the acoustics and timbre of the room through the introduction of sound. Often the architecture of the space can be responsible for the sound we here as much as the singer. It is a combination of them both, which presents to us the quality of the sound.

Lothar allows spaces to sing, to display to us their timbres, resonances, through colour not sound.

Like an acoustician being able to hear the timbre of the room before the choir has sung, Lothar can read the spaces inherent personality and makes it visible. He breathes colour into the space and the space, along with the colour produces the work concurrently. One does not lead nor overpower, as with the choir and the room, both are integral to the final outcome.

This is where I feel Lothar differs so greatly from Turrell and the beginning of the text. Turrell was simply lighting the architecture, highlighting, or pointing it out. As if he was taking his breath and breathing onto a glass to make it visible for us all to see, this was an illustration making the overlooked visible through colour.

Lothar on the other hand goes further, he takes a deep breath and projects, sings into the space, using colour, architecture and the innate resonance of the room to transform all the elements together, when you enter the work you can still here the highest notes ringing as in the best concert halls.

Most excitingly he has removed the life support from our museum space, he has taken the architecture of the past and allowed us to hear its voice today, and like all the best artists, invites us to breathe deep and sing along.



## A Retreat for the Good Shepherd

Jenny Gleadell

It has been said that Lothar Götz's work, whether it is a wall painting, drawing or intervention, enters into a dialogue with the space it inhabits. A dialogue is an exchange of ideas; Götz's work both gives and takes, responding not only to spaces but how people use them. Though today it is fairly common to consider public and site specific art in terms of a 'dialogue',<sup>1</sup> this consideration does not often translate to the space of the art gallery. Here, Götz's work breaks with a surprisingly common conception of 'art' as being the sole vehicle for meaning, art as autonomous.

This essay explores the 'dialogue' between *A Retreat for the Good Shepherd* and the space it inhabits. It will also propose that Götz's work encourages us to rethink our relationship with the gallery space. Theorist and philosopher, John Berger, in the seminal 'Ways of Seeing', told us explicitly that context affects how we understand art.

Using *A Retreat for the Good Shepherd*, this essay will question whether art can affect how we understand context. This is not a linear, chronological exploration; the essay will echo the bubble and flow, the push and the pull of spoken dialogue. Beginning with a consideration of the space itself as a 'retreat', the essay will jump to the idea of monumentality in religious and secular architecture and then to the idea of false space.

*A Retreat for the Good Shepherd* is a wall painting created by Götz for the inside of a recreation of the Russell Chantry from Lincoln Cathedral. Even without us knowing about the history of the space, the original mural or the role of the gallery, the work can begin to create a dialogue with the space. Though it is clearly a temporary structure, inside, it looks like a chapel and space of worship. Art critic and theorist, John Berger, tells us that context affects how we understand art work. Galleries and museums present a flawed idea of objectivity to the viewer, whereas our understanding of religious spaces is subjectivity. *A Retreat for the Good Shepherd* is situated in an art gallery surrounded by other works that we have been told are 'art' so should we see it objectively as 'art'?

In my opinion, the presence of the chapel structure can encourage us to think differently about the site of the gallery. Our understanding of the function of a chapel space is different to our understanding of the function of an art gallery and this piece seems to blur those boundaries. Can this space actually be a chapel within this context, can the chapel at Lincoln Cathedral be a gallery or installation?

In recent years, there has been a proliferation of scholarly research into 'public art', academics exploring and proposing how public art can create new ways for people to engage with the spaces they know and inhabit.<sup>2</sup> A work that comes to mind as an interesting counterpoint to *A Retreat for the Good Shepherd* is *Sanctum* by American artist Theaster Gates, a temporary performance space that Gates built within a bombed-out church in Bristol in late 2015. In this piece, Gates was interested in 'activating the living [materials and spaces]', and his work 'offered... the opportunity to see the world as if it were different'.<sup>3</sup>

Despite the obvious difference between the two works, one being in the public non-gallery setting and Götz's being in a gallery, this is clearly a similar alteration of the surroundings can happen here.

*A Retreat for the Good Shepherd* is a space within a space. Though the title suggests that the work offers a retreat for the protagonist of Duncan Grant's original mural, the Good Shepherd, perhaps weary from years of being the source of inspiration, controversy and spectacle, it also serves to offer the viewer a physical space of rest.

To enter the space, you must step over a wooden ledge that replicates the entrance into the Russell Chantry in Lincoln. This step creates your first awareness of spatial difference; though you are in a gallery, in order

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<sup>1</sup> For an in depth survey of current and relevant public art discussion, read: Claire Doherty, *Out of Time, Out of Place, Public Art (Now)*, (London, 2015)

<sup>2</sup> Again, look to Claire Doherty, *Out of Time, Out of Place, Public Art (Now)*, (London, 2015)

<sup>3</sup> Theaster Gates, *Sanctum*, performance catalogue, *Situations* (Bristol, 2015) 13

to view Götz's work you must remove yourself from the gallery itself. This space of solitude and personal experience within an art gallery is unusual. Since roughly the eighteenth century, our Western concept of an art gallery has been of a social and public space, a space of spectacle and a space to be seen. The architecture of museums and galleries, as opposed to promoting personal, private experiences, promotes mass movement and ultimate visibility. In order to explain the results of this technique on the viewer, art historians have applied Michel Foucault's concept of the panopticon prison system,<sup>4</sup> where the pure visibility of everything and everyone leads the prisoners to self-regulate. It also gives ultimate optical power to the central prison guard. *A Retreat for the Good Shepherd* offers an alternative, a personal space where the viewer is empowered through a sense of privacy and questioning our usual relationship with the 'gallery' as a space of display and socialising.

Religious architecture is often sublime, creating statements of power and endurance through design and engineering, yet the chapel that houses *A Retreat for the Good Shepherd* is temporary, therefore contradicting our fundamental conception of sacred spaces as spaces of permanence. This chapel is made of MDF, glue and nails, as opposed to the stone, cement and marble of the original Russell Chantry. MDF as a building material is versatile and cheap, but not extremely hardwearing; *A Retreat for the Good Shepherd* is not meant to last forever. This contradicts the idea of permanence driving the construction of much Christian architecture, Lincoln Cathedral being a clear example. Commissioned by William the Conqueror in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, through its grand, Gothic architecture, Lincoln Cathedral represents power and success and religious might. Here, 'monumentality' is central; monuments transcend both time and humanity.

Interestingly, religious murals and art made for these spaces also tell stories that are meant to transcend temporal and narrative constraints; in the bible, the story of the Good Shepherd is apparently just as relevant to people today as it was over 2000 years ago. Contrarily, Götz's mural is absolutely temporally tied to the construction out of wood of this space within the gallery; it is temporary, the wood and paint is delicate and the fate of the work after the exhibition is unclear. The temporal limitations placed on *A Retreat for the Good Shepherd* both contradict our associations with religious architecture, while also encouraging an intense relationship with the viewer and context; exhibitions are fundamentally transient and it is something you have to come to terms with.

The quality of utter flatness, as opposed to visual trickery and forced perspective, seems central to Götz's wall-paintings, whether painting the private bedroom of a collector, or a station on the London Underground network. The murals in Lincoln Cathedral, painted by Duncan Grant, which provided one of many starting points for this work, also contain flatness; in Grant's mural, the perspective is warped and he does not create foreshortened illusions of depth in his mural. Historically, murals have been characterised by creating 'false space' and depth, through trompe l'oeil effects. These are images for us to fall into.

This idea of fooling the eye is not just associated with 'figurative' work but also, more recently, with Op Art from around the 1960s. Think of the optically moving canvases of Bridget Riley and even the spatial interventions of Carlos Cruz Diez whose static work in public spaces seems to visibly change as viewers move around, through or over it. During his childhood, Götz spent much time within German Baroque churches in which trompe l'oeil is used prolifically; the pillars, gilding, ceiling, altars are all painted, the illusion of depth and luxury can be achieved through painterly techniques. The whole space is the painting, a gesamtkunstwerk,

<sup>4</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, trans. A. Sheridan (London, 1995)



The interior of the Baroque Asamkirche, officially known as the St Johann Nepomuk church, an example of the highly decorated trompe l'oeil Baroque church.

or 'total work of art', of the most elaborate order. In the *A Retreat for the Good Shepherd*, Götz references this idea of luxury with sections of gold paint.

The concept of the *gesamkunstwerk*, originating from Germany in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, is also applicable to this work; here Götz has created a mural that covers the entire chapel space. However, we remain aware that this is ultimately a painted surface and that is where the key difference remains; similarly to Grant, Götz does not attempt to create an illusion of depth or further space, the work is a celebration of paint and geometry itself.

As a conclusion to this essay, but not an attempt to close the dialogue, *A Retreat for the Good Shepherd*, this essay demonstrates that there are many diverse ways to consider the work and the context. As this essay has exposed, considering the work from the perspective of dialogue breaks the work out of being simply a 'work of art in a gallery'; this approach allows us to look around.

## Geom David McSherry

*Geom* is a new sound wall commission by artist David McSherry for the exhibition, *The Russell Chantry: Lothar Götz/ Duncan Grant*. In this piece, David uses sound to respond to the work of both Duncan Grant and Lothar Götz, creating an entirely new experience.

Sacred music is at the centre of this composition. David chose John Taverner's 'The Lamb' as a starting point, in response to the imagery of the Good Shepherd in Duncan's mural. Religious music also plays an important role in our experience of the original Russell Chantry mural; the sound of choirs and hymns permeate into the chapel space from the main cathedral. This work brings our attention to something we do not often consider when in an art gallery, the sounds around us and how these can affect our experience.

After deconstructing the harmonic aspects of 'The Lamb', David then uses simple triangle waveforms and a 'geometric sequencer' in order to create rhythmic patterns in the piece, in response to Lothar's geometric shapes. Playing the work across the 22 audio channels of our permanent soundwall creates what David calls audible 'sound shapes'. Here David pushes the boundaries between visual and audible art and experience.

ADD IN LINK HERE

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