



CLARE HALL CAMBRIDGE

50th Anniversary Exhibition



David Tress, '*Pembrokeshire Landscape*', watercolour and gouache, 1997.

Highlights of the Art Collection

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Highlights of Clare Hall's Art Collection

Introduction

'Empty walls mean empty minds.' They put things bluntly in Yorkshire and this was a phrase much used by a Sheffield museum curator when he wanted to justify the need for art. In Cambridge, however, it is more or less impossible to have an empty mind, so we need to delve deeper into the purposes behind the making of Clare Hall's collection of art, for, as in the case of many other colleges, it has helped shape Clare Hall's identity.

Clare Hall is fifty this year and yet in appearance it is still the most modern college in Cambridge. It has competitors in Churchill College and its near neighbour Robinson College, but it does not compromise a modern style with the traditional expectations attendant on collegiate buildings. The clean lines which Ralph Erskine brought to the design of Clare Hall's central complex are beautifully captured by Alan Powers in a watercolour included in this anniversary exhibition. This is a forward-looking college, it seems to say, which conveys its sprightly dynamic through lightness of form. It is sourced by ideas from Scandinavia and from the ground-breaking achievement of International Modernism. It is not surprising, therefore, that there are spaces in this college which attract art. A changing roster of pictures, prints and photographs punctuate its walls while sculpture ornaments the open spaces, all adding to the welcome which buildings and gardens convey. And a collection of art has steadily grown. At some point it was realised that the internal courtyard made a suitable exhibition space. A ground rule was laid down: that artists could exhibit and sell work at Clare Hall, without let or hindrance, except for the fact that one item in the exhibition had to be given to the college. In this way the college has been steadily acquiring an interesting collection of contemporary art. But this is not the collection's only source. Many visiting fellows or research associates have gifted works to the college. And because the community at

Clare Hall gives rise to international interests, the collection includes works of art representative of many countries. One example is the photograph, show here, titled 'Holy Cross', which David Buxton, who was a Research Fellow at Clare Hall 1967-73, gave to the college, while writing his pioneering book *Wooden Churches in Eastern Europe*. It is a fine example of what is still a relatively little-known building genre.

As a whole, the collection may seem haphazard, but this, too, is in keeping with Clare Hall's openness and commitment to the new. This art collection is not so much a reflection of the college's status, history or prestige, but, seemingly, a natural outcome of the ongoing life of an ever-changing academic community. Both Annamaria Motrescu-Mayes and I have welcomed the opportunity to spend time with this collection. We are grateful to the Anniversary Events Committee for conceiving this exhibition and thank all those in the college who in some way helped with its hanging and presentation.

Frances Spalding

Fellow, Clare Hall

A celebration and a tribute

After almost five decades of collecting artworks, mostly through donations, Clare Hall hosts now over 600 items of eclectic and often inspirational art, from paintings, textiles and drawings to glass sculptures, European folk ceramic and Japanese calligraphy. Celebrating this collection is always a double tribute to art itself and to Clare Hall's international network of artists and academics. Supported by its global community of life members, the college has secured during its first fifty years a tradition that goes beyond immediate educational achievements, platforms and affiliations. It is a tradition of belonging – one that overwrites the customary short-term associations through study programmes and fellowships. In a fittingly illustrative manner, the art collection testifies to this sense of belonging as most of the artworks have been offered to the college in recognition of its mission to promote high-profile scholarship in a non-hierarchical environment.

The thirty artworks selected for the **50th Anniversary Exhibition** are meant to highlight the heterogeneous style and media found across our art collection and, implicitly, to emphasise the wide-ranging artistic and academic interests of the Clare Hall Art Friends – the ever growing community of art donors and artists associated with the college; a community led by Helaine Blumenfeld whose *Flame* (patinated bronze, 2004) celebrates Clare Hall's intellectual identity. Cultural variety and divergent art styles define the theme of the anniversary exhibition with works by Zachary Beer, Dominic Sansoni, Robin Stemp and Milein Cosman shaping the visual narrative. For instance, Beer's *View with a Meteorite* (oil on canvas, 2014) explores the gripping intimacy of magnified meteorite fragments, Liz Moon's *Plants and Insects* (watercolour, 2000) employs a lyrical palette to depict scientific investigations, Sansoni's *Tree and Building* (black and white photograph, 1979) recalls the hypnotic stillness of urban utopias found in Michelangelo Antonioni's early films, and Stanley William Hayter's *Rideau* (etching, 1977) proposes a distinctive chromatic octave with a fluent and energetic design. Within a convergent thematic framework are also Robin Stemp's *Waiting for Vanya* (photograph, 2014) in which miniatures, light and pastel colour evoke Chekhovian dramaturgy, Milein Cosman's *John Ogden* (etching, 1990) – a brisk drawing in which lines vibrate as if in tune with the late pianist's stunning performances, and Peter Nuttall's *Fantastical City* (watercolour, 1973) in which expressionist and surreal notes fold into a medieval storyline.

Finally, the cover image for Clare Hall **50th Anniversary Exhibition**, David Tress' **Pembrokeshire Landscape** (watercolour and gouache, 1997), summarizes the key elements defining this show: layered vibrancy, rich visual impact, an open-ended horizon and the out-of-frame eruption of perspective and narrative. These are also essential features of the intellectual life at Clare Hall – a college where the culture of belonging is already safely anchored in the tradition of an enthusiastic, alternative and robust exploration of global scholarship.

Annamaria Motrescu-Mayes

Fellow, Clare Hall



Robin Stemp, *Waiting*



For Vanya

ing for Vanya, 2014



Alan Powers, *Clare Hall*, 1978



Holy Cross, 1968



Dominic Sansoni, *Tree and Building*, 1979



Zachary Beer, *View with a Meteorite*, 2014



Milein Cosman, *John Ogden*, 1990



Helaine Blumenfeld, *Flame*, 2004