

Press

Is sacred art possible in a secular age? The question coursed through the 20th century – Chagall and Stanley Spencer, in very different ways, were among the few who answered with conviction – and is yet more fraught with doubt today. So it was a bold, inspired decision of Father Alan Green to commission Chris Gollon to paint 14 ‘Stations of the Cross’ for the beautiful Grade One listed John Soane church on Bethnal Green. Gollon has worked on the paintings since 2000, but the complete series was unveiled for the first time yesterday, on Good Friday.

The contrast between Gollon’s absurdist, too-late expressionist style, with its echoes of Bosch, Goya, Beckman, Grosz, and the neo-classical church will draw attention to both. Discomfort, disjunction, surprise are the point. Gollon’s near-cartoonish grotesque villains, glossy, fashion-magazine women, stone-tablet speech bubbles (“Away from Him!”, “No!”), and the giant arrows that shoot across his pictures highlighting their emotional centre all give an immediate, vernacular tone to art history’s most traditional iconography.



Chris Gollon, *Stations of the Cross (XIV): Jesus Is Laid in the Sepulchre*, 2007

Gollon modelled Jesus on his son, Mary – with mascara running down her cheeks – on his daughter, Nicodemus on Father Alan. Like Spencer, he dramatises the everyday in contemporary images and, depicting our clumsy, ridiculous ordinariness, brings alive for a modern, clinical audience the ghastly dissonance of this story of good and evil, sacrifice and humanity, answering on its own terms a 21st-century culture that regards the heroic as absurd.

Jackie Wullschläger
Chief Visual Art Critic, 'Critic's Choice' Financial Times
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“Gollon by his own admission was not a religious man. Perhaps it is for this reason that the humanity of Christ is so evident in his Stations... Here is a Christ with whom we can empathise.”

Jonathan Koestlé-Cate

“What I have learned is that opening myself to his images has actually deepened my own.”

Sara Maitland

“Chris Gollon bears down on the terrible, his approach works, and shocks us into understanding...”

Sister Wendy Beckett
Carmelite nun, art critic and author