

Powell's School Christingle in Cirencester Parish Church. Pastel and charcoal on Stonehenge paper, 2024.

Like us, a building responds to whatever is happening inside or around it. And it holds its history, like a person does, in its bones or stones, because they're all just atoms. That's what I'm trying to capture in this picture.

Powell's School Christingle Service makes this Church reverberate. It inheres the energy of a thousand people who become, for a short time, a part of this giant body full of fluctuations in energy, movement, sound, light, temperature and space. And to me, it's as if the building feels that.

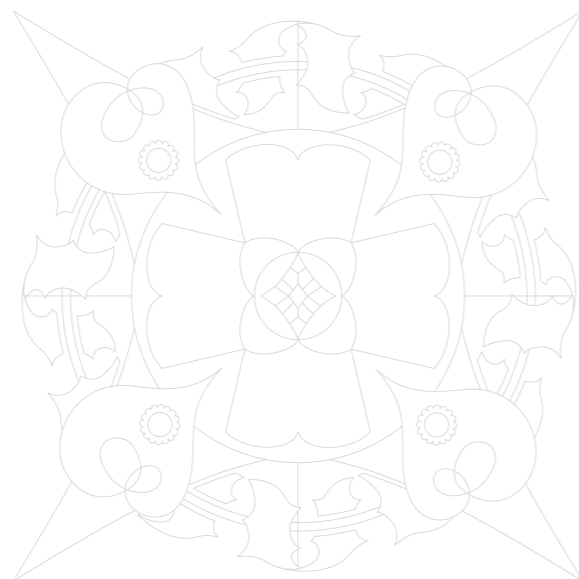
As Walt Whitman wrote in his poem 'Song of Myself', "I celebrate myself, and sing myself, And what I assume you shall assume, For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you."

Study for Cirencester Parish Church. Pastel and charcoal on rag paper, 2022.

I think a building is like a body.
It has a skin and a skeleton and insides.
There is the space it occupies; where it stands.
There is the space around it.
There is the space it holds or encloses.

I've drawn and painted this church thousands of times to try and find a way to make a picture about it. To try and understand it instinctually. Each time things get left out or added back in. Absence guarantees the identity of what is left behind. I'm trying to learn how to draw or paint my church, from scratch; from the simplest level up.

As the artist Hughie O'Donoghue said, "I am constantly questioning why I do what I do and how I do it: and I'm constantly trying to move against those things that I do easily. It is implicit in my work that you don't just come in one day and say "I think I'll paint a boat today" and then at the end of the day I have painted a boat. It might take me ten years to paint a boat because I have to learn how to paint my boat, to build and expand my language."



**Daniel Bingham
Foundation
GALLERY**

To find out more about the Daniel Bingham Foundation & Gallery visit:
danielbinghamfoundation.org.uk

Supported and funded by the Daniel Bingham Foundation. The Daniel Bingham Foundation is the public facing name of the Bingham Library Trust, a registered charity in England and Wales No.7365370.

To enquire about purchasing artworks & limited edition prints contact: laurieplant@yahoo.com
laurieplant.com

The Bingham Gallery Exhibition 24/25



Contemporary Artwork by Laurie Plant

The Trustees of the Daniel Bingham Foundation have invited artist Laurie Plant to curate this exhibition of his work in The Bingham Gallery alongside pieces from their Permanent Collection.

'Contemporary Artwork by Laurie Plant' brings together selected works about Cirencester, Bingham and the artist's recent work. The pieces exhibited here show his approaches to painting and drawing directly from life, often outside or on location, in addition to work made in the studio.

Based in Cirencester, Plant works on art projects and teaches art in education and outreach programmes. In 2012, Plant was commissioned by the Daniel Bingham Foundation to make the artwork exhibited here.

Read on to hear, in the artists own words, his thoughts and motivations behind the works.

Cirencester Capital Of The Cotswolds (For Daniel George Bingham). Acrylic on canvas, 2012. Commissioned for the Permanent Collection of the Daniel Bingham Foundation.

I have attempted to imagine and shape this artwork about Cirencester as if it were filtered through Daniel Bingham's vision and outlook as much as my own. To step into his shoes, so to say, as an artist, is a bit of a ridiculous sort of thing to try and achieve! It jumbles up history and personalities and ends up looking like this picture here today.

The project took two years to complete, and in keeping with Bingham's philanthropy was created as a gift for the town. Looking closer, you may find all sorts of puzzles and questions about places, symbols, words, objects, people, animals and architecture. Many of these embody ideas about Bingham's vision, which shape the Cirencester that we know and love today. Education, enterprise, ingenuity, reading and literacy, civility, generosity and kindness; all values that Bingham's legacy still continues to develop today, are embedded in this picture.

The influences and ideas in this project are inextricably interwoven to be both clear and confusing at the same time. The aim of this is to make us puzzle, notice things and think about Cirencester as a living, breathing, constantly changing town that somehow also stays the same. As the artist De Kooning would say: "You have to change to stay the same."

Daniel Bingham spent much of his time in the Netherlands, so to reflect on this situation, some of the ideas and techniques in this painting are influenced by Dutch Art, in particular a playful use of lenses as a tool for refraction, focus, distortion, magnification, and anamorphosis. Not being weighed down by history; I use tradition to foster creativity.

This painting invites us to consider Cirencester's history, to question our role in it today, and how we can help shape its future. I hope, if he were still here, that Daniel Bingham would be pleased with this artwork.



'Cirencester Capital Of The Cotswolds (For Daniel George Bingham)'

Spitalgate From St John's Chantry Arches, Cirencester. Charcoal and pastel on Fabriano rag paper, 2022.

I want a drawing like this to flow. It's difficult because on the one hand you have to be completely open to the fact that anything is possible, and on the other hand stay completely focussed. When you look at Francis Bacon's paintings, the outward appearance of 'wild expression' belies the careful execution of his marks. Well rehearsed but, and here's the catch, never predictable. I think Bacon even used to practice with his brushes on his own face in the mirror. When I see his paintings, his brush marks, they're electric, like he felt his life depended on it.

Powell's Schoolchildren At The Abbey Grounds Lake. Oil on board, 2022.

For me, Constable's small plein-air sketches are far more exciting than most of his 'six-footers'. Flatford Mill from a lock on the Stour, 1811, is painted on a coloured ground that shows through as part of his palette. He does it so well that you can just accept the clouds are partly brown etc. But it's more than that, it's curious how he uses a coloured ground and the whole painting floats on it. He creates a deep vista on a resolutely flat surface. If you look at a bit of it, the marks don't make much sense, but as they piece together, a logic emerges that's totally compelling. That's what I'm after.

Blackjack Street, Birthplace Of Daniel Bingham. Pencil and Watercolour on paper, 2013.

It requires a lot of energy to work outside but I love making large pictures directly from life. I just try and fix it down on paper, whatever it is, as honestly as I can. And if it happens to look 'modern' or 'contemporary', whatever that means, then that's incidental, because I think it's implicit anyway that stuff is 'of its time'. I never try to make something 'look modern', I just try and make it differently; to see it anew! The possibilities are endless...

Today, more than ever I think that so much art is full of 'arty-art stuff' and clever tricks, and it looks so flimsy and it kills you. Brancusi said "It is something to be clever, but being honest is worthwhile."

Cirencester Open Air Pool 1. Charcoal and pastel on paper, 2012. Kindly on loan from COASP.

I made this study in preparation for the Daniel George Bingham commission project. I loved being at the Open Air Pool so much that I kept going back and learnt to swim and now love swimming!

An exciting thing about this drawing is how the swimmers in the water transform the space. In isolation they look like scribble, but in the picture as a whole they make perfect sense.

It's fairly easy to create a good photographic or topographic likeness of something. AI: Artificial Intelligence can do that brilliantly. But the real difficulty is to get past that likeness, to make it come alive. To give it energy. And whatever it is... I don't know what it is, but it's something, like those swimmers, that gives a painting a life of its own.

An Angel In Cirencester. Acrylic on canvas, 2009. Kindly on loan from a private collection.

Do you believe in Angels? I put one in my painting. Here's a thought from Philip Guston: "I go to the studio every day because one day I may go and the angel will be there. What if I don't go and the angel comes?"

A Need For Green Spaces, Cirencester Abbey Grounds. Charcoal and pastel on paper, 2022.

I'm outside in the park and recognise familiar sights, then I'm drawing them and everything begins changing and moving. The picture is absorbing stuff like a sponge. And reality slips and slides around you and you're trying to get a grip of it, like you're trying to pin it down and fix it on this silly, flat surface. But you can't really. I mean, what a silly thing to attempt: It's like trying to nail a jelly to the wall! I have drawn and painted this same park hundreds of times and every time it's different and the picture's different and of course, I'm different!

To The Park, Cirencester Abbey Grounds. Oil on canvas, 2022.

I painted this outside, it took about a dozen visits there. Every time, if you're lucky, you can get so immersed in it that you get lost in the act. You forget about everything else and everyone else and if you're lucky, you even forget about yourself. You're not there either. The ego is gone, so you stand a chance. You sometimes get a window of opportunity where anything is possible because you don't recognise it anymore, and you can create something in spite of yourself. I think that's why the artist Alberto Giacometti said, "The most difficult thing to do is what's most familiar."

A Picture Of A Portrait Of A Place, Cirencester. Mixed media collage, 2024.

This artwork is an attempt to open up some ideas that are floating around in the adjacent painting: Cirencester Capital Of The Cotswolds (For Daniel Bingham). It includes working ideas and personal notes about methodology, techniques and other artists' work and influences as a way of exploring a person and a place.

Self Portrait. No, Painting Is Not Done To Decorate Apartments. It Is An Instrument Of War. Pastel on paper, 2023.

At the time of making this self-portrait I was and still am, deeply affected by the news of the illegal deportation of children during the outbreak of war in Ukraine. Picasso said, "It is my wish at this time to remind you that I have always believed, and still believe that artists who live and work with spiritual values cannot and should not remain indifferent to a conflict in which the highest values of humanity and civilisation are at stake." Why is my hand over my mouth? This picture is about how art can question authority. At what point do you start burning all the books? Picasso said, "No, painting is not done to decorate apartments. It is an instrument of war."

Iconic London. Acrylic on canvas, 2008.

These pictures aren't the same if they're not square. A square painting allows the structures, the visual registers and the illusions of space to be considered as abstract parts of an abstract painting. This helps if you're trying to put together recognisable or familiar things (like London icons) because you can consider them differently. As painter Constantin Brancusi wrote, "Exactitude is the confusion of familiar things. Art is creating things that one is unfamiliar with."

City Of Bath Spa. Acrylic on canvas, 2008.

This painting centres on Bath as a Spa City. I love the idea of making all these buildings flow together, moving like they're in spa water, or water going down a plug hole, or a black hole where we don't really know what happens next. As the architect Zaha Hadid said, "I'm inspired by the fluidity of nature and aim to incorporate it into my designs... I always thought that architecture is about the creation of space, and that movement is the most important thing in architecture."

Venice 1. Acrylic on canvas, 2008.

Architecture and water together is an exciting combination. Especially when illusions of space or light are involved. For example, in the centre of this painting where canals merge it's confusing how one illusion 'slips' into another, especially as one area disappears under a shadowy bridge. I like the puddle of water in Piero della Francesca's Baptism of Christ. It seems to 'throw' the space like a shortcut; like there's a portal in the ground! Similarly, that's why I admire Patrick Hughes' paintings. They confound our expectations, because they're full of visual paradoxes and illusionary puns.

Around St Pauls, City of London. Acrylic on canvas, 2008.

What is the point in making yet another painting of a city? Artist James Rosenquist's comments about this are insightful: "When you're making something, you're constantly asking yourself what you're doing... That's the part that excites you. The work part doesn't, the possibility of a new outcome does. He goes on to say "It's scary putting a new vision together that can change your thinking or someone else's. I think it can be done. You can make something so beautiful or so serious, or so ugly that it scrambles your mind and changes your attitude towards seeing things. A metaphor for it is finding a new dimension. That sounds like science, but the new dimension might be right at hand. It's like sitting and unravelling your sweater; all of a sudden, the whole atmosphere changes because of one loose thread."