

St. Leonard's Church Seaford

Altar table and four seasonal panels by Polly Meynell

Dating from the 11th century St. Leonard's Church in Seaford has recently undergone a radical reordering and refurbishment. However the newly created space lacked some fundamental pieces of furniture, and two artists; Polly Meynell and Mel Howse, were asked to design a new altar table and font to complete the works. Polly Meynell designed a modern altar table to reflect the interior curves of the building. Constructed in ash, it is a smooth oval shape with a 'waisted' pedestal base both horizontally and vertically curved. Designed to be viewed from all sides; the table can be mobile in order to give flexibility to the space for worship or other events. Four detachable fabric panels, stretched over wooden frames, hang in turn on the front of the altar. Their colour, and the contemporary movement and symbolism in their design, are jewel-like against the ash of the table. All four panels follow a theme of a layered composition. Starting with a hand-woven silk base and adding layers of hand-dyed and embroidered pieces the designs follow the liturgical themes of growth for Green, suffering and passion for Red, celebration and purity for White, and promise for Purple.



Polly Meynell is an ecclesiastical textile artist and colour consultant. Her other recent commissions include the complete interior design for a new build church in Crawley, a five metre tall triptych for a 300 seat auditorium church, and a set of five copes for Guildford Cathedral to commemorate its 50th Anniversary. Other works can be seen on www.pollymeynell.com



The Font by Mel Howse



The form of the new font for St. Leonard's Seaford is a contemporary, unconventional approach created to meet the church's design brief. St. Leonard's wanted to celebrate baptism with a spiritual piece of design that was unusual and artistic. A re-ordering of the church had made their worship space more versatile, so it was important that the font would be both mobile and functional.

Designer Mel Howse's response has resulted in a font whose sculptural form is itself symbolic, cylindrical, without beginning or end. Spiritually deepens within the crafted baptism vessel itself. Her technical approach to the piece covers both art and innovation using a combination of materials and surfaces.

The form of the font grows from a turned oak stand which rises tree-like from the floor, separated from the floor by a shadow. A cast acrylic collar joins the oak stand to the vessel, creating the notion that the baptism bowl is floating on water. The finale is the steel bowl, with vibrant colours in vitreous enamel spilling into the vessel's interior. This is hand-worked and fired by Mel Howse. The interior of the vessel reveals a cacophony of swirling blues and turquoise, in contrast to the serenity of the font's silhouette.

Mel Howse is a glass artist and enameller who specialises in designing and making art for ecclesiastical settings. Other recent commissions include a glass and stone altar, a glass reredos, stations of the cross and stained glass windows. See more of her work for churches at melhowse.com

