



Mark Alexander, *Red Mannheim*
Oil on canvas, 405 x 300cm, 2010

Press Release

Mark Alexander artworks displayed in St Paul's Cathedral

London (2nd June 2010)

*Mark Alexander, Mannheim Altarpiece, St. Paul's Cathedral
16th June – late summer 2010*

St Paul's has chosen two new works by the British artist Mark Alexander to be hung either side of the nave this summer. The installation forms part of St Paul's Cathedral Arts Project, an ongoing programme which seeks to explore the encounter between art and faith.

Both entitled *Red Mannheim*, Alexander's large red silkscreens are inspired by the Mannheim Cathedral altarpiece (1739-41), which was looted by Allied forces after an air raid in the Second World War. The original sculpture depicts Christ on the cross, surrounded by a familiar retinue of mourners. Rendered in splendid giltwood, with Christ's wracked body sculpted in relief, and the flourishes of flora and incandescent rays from heaven, this masterpiece of the German Rococo is an object of ravishing beauty and intense piety.

Alexander's *Red Mannheim* works show the empty, shadow-marked wall space where the altarpiece once hung, the crucifix now a soaked impression and the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene dark silhouettes. At the foot of each canvas, two cherubs play gaily by a tree. This unusual combination of baleful symbolism and pastoral idyll is deepened by the crimson colouring, which seeps into the canvases like a stain, metaphorically enacting the blotting of memory. The idea of reaching into the past is underscored by the patches of blackened red which become darker and less easy to read towards the margins - this sense of removal, as if one is looking through a veil, is sealed by the thimble-shaped outline that rises from the altar ledge up to the top of the cross, revealing the subject as if both through a portal and a gauze.

Replicating the vast size and power of the Mannheim altarpiece, Alexander's works offer a contemporary reflection on loss and the desecration of icons. They are devotional images that recall the eternal image of Christ's crucifixion and the atrocities of war, but also lament the passing of the innocence of youth and provide an elegiac remembrance of things past.

The placing of these modern masterworks in St Paul's is fitting given the cathedral's spiritual and architectural connection to the Mannheim Cathedral, yet there is also a symbolic parallel between the history of St. Paul's as a bastion of British defiance during the Blitz, and Alexander's resurrection of a bombed and blasted icon.

Canon Giles Fraser, Chancellor of St Paul's Cathedral said,
"St Paul's offers a powerful context in which to explore the relationship between art and faith. We hope that these images will enhance the experience of those visiting the cathedral, and provide a fitting focus for reflection and contemplation."

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For more information please contact:

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Note to editors:

- **St Paul's Cathedral** is the cathedral church of the diocese of London, which it has served for over 1,400 years. The current building has become a potent symbol of the life of a nation and is one of the world's most beautiful buildings. Designed by Sir Christopher Wren in the late seventeenth century, its stones have absorbed the hopes, fears, sorrows and joys of generations and stand as an enduring symbol of our communion with those gone before and those still to come. Each year nearly two million people flock to the cathedral for services, concerts, debates, educational events, performing arts and sightseeing. All are most welcome.
- **St Paul's Cathedral Arts Project** is an ongoing programme which seeks to explore the encounter between art and faith. Recent projects have included installations by Antony Gormley, Rebecca Horn, Yoko Ono and Martin Firrell.
- **Mark Alexander** was born in 1966 and educated at Oxford University. Solo exhibitions include *A Blacker Gold*, Haunch of Venison, Berlin, 2009 and *A Bigger Victory*, Haunch of Venison, London, 2005. His work has been included in international group exhibitions including the *Summer Exhibition*, Royal Academy, London, 2008 and 2010, *Painting on the Move* at the Kunsthalle Basel, 2002, and *I am a Camera* at the Saatchi gallery in 2001.