

## **EXHIBITION COPY – PLEASE LEAVE FOR OTHERS TO READ**

Welcome to A+E, the Cathedral's art and ecology project. This is a working space and an exhibition space. Please enjoy the exhibition – if you have any questions we'd be happy to answer them. You can also use the space to sit, read and draw in. Or you can borrow a book or collect some drawing materials to take out into the Cathedral grounds.

### **Exhibition:**

#### **A Cathedral Tentacular – Drawings for a Regenerative Cathedral**

*Digital prints and wall drawings*

**Sarah Gittins (digital prints and wall drawings) with Jonathan Baxter (concept and co-design)**

The exhibition takes inspiration from two sources. 1. Donna Haraway's understanding of tentacular thinking and 2. the Cathedral's desire to become a Regenerative Cathedral.

(See the accompanying sheet for definitions of both terms.)

Entangling these ideas through a series of drawings and digital prints (7 in this exhibition with more on the way), we ask what a Regenerative Cathedral might look like, taste like, feel like, smell like, sound like, and move like if it adopted a tentacular-regenerative response to the climate and ecological crisis? Specifically, we ask:

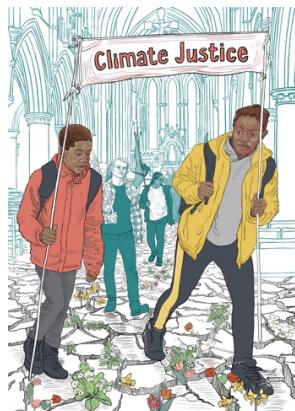
How can this place support multispecies flourishing? How can the Cathedral respond to the triple crises of climate change, species loss and wider environmental collapse? In what small but significant ways can the Cathedral be a beacon through difficult times to address contemporary social and environmental injustices?

Some of the images show ways that the Cathedral community and the A+E project have already undertaken action to support human and more-than-human flourishing, and some images envision additional becoming-more-imaginative forms of mitigation and adaptation in response to the climate and ecological crisis.

In addition to the wall drawings and prints the exhibition includes a small 'reading room'. Here you'll find some of the tentacular-regenerative reading material that informs A+E's engagement at the Cathedral. You'll also find a selection of ecotheological and Christian animist texts that challenge normative readings of Christianity as *necessarily* anti-ecological, colonial and patriarchal in form.

Notes about the digital prints and the wall drawings follow – in display order from left to right:

## Pilgrimage for COP26



In October 2021 A+E organised a Pilgrimage for COP26, walking from Dunbar to Glasgow, pausing in Edinburgh for two days for a series of curated events. Here we see some of the younger pilgrims passing through the Cathedral building. The Cathedral floor has become the parched earth that is an increasing reality for countries suffering long term drought conditions in Central Africa as a direct result of climate change.

Pilgrimage for COP26 was partly inspired by the Song School murals by Phoebe Anna Traquair. These murals include a procession of people walking through a Borders landscape of biodiversity. The murals wrap around the walls of the Song School where the Choristers practice on a daily basis. In this exhibition some of the flowers that grow around the processor's feet are making their way through the cracked earth.

Pilgrims have also made their way into the wall drawings of this exhibition – carrying flags from the Beach of Dreams (<https://kinetika.co.uk/portfolio/beach-of-dreams-new>), dancing on a beach after a long day's walk, walking with the Coat of Hopes ([www.coatofhopes.uk](http://www.coatofhopes.uk)) and cooking together.

## Swifts



In recent years members of the Cathedral Eco Group have been seeking to encourage swifts by installing nesting boxes in the roof of the Cathedral. Swift populations are declining rapidly, in part due to the disappearance of suitable nesting

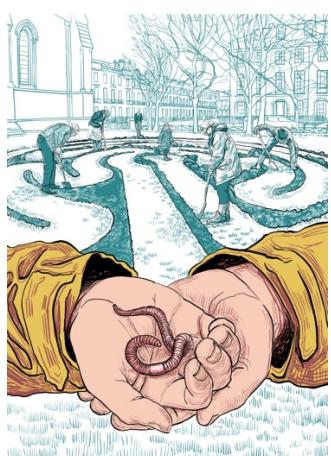
places in old buildings and churches. In 2021 swifts were placed on the red list of the UK Conservation Status Report. Every year swifts make their extraordinary 3,400 mile journey from winter in Africa to summer in the UK and back again. If a swift lands on the ground it is stranded and cannot take off again alone. Here Mo, a member of the Cathedral's Eco Group, is holding up a stranded swift on the palms of her hands, to help it return to the air. Hospitality to these great migrants is also symbolic of the Cathedral's and A+E's desire to *welcome the stranger*. In the wall drawings swifts fly above the pilgrims and refugees, perhaps acknowledging that we are all climate migrants now.

### Ring Out



Once a month a group of young activists meet to ring the Cathedral bells as a vigil and call-out for climate justice (<https://artandecology.earth/ring-out-a-climate-justice-youth-project>). This drawing sets the Ring Out action within imagery that calls to mind an awareness of rainforest destruction – a major driver in climate change and loss of biodiversity. There is also imagery of oil palm fruit on the forest floor and a single orangutan swinging from forest vines. Great swathes of tropical rainforests are cleared to make way for palm oil plantations, driven by the high demand for the oil palm fruit as an ingredient in global food and detergent production. 90% of the world's palm oil trees are grown on a few islands in Malaysia and Indonesia – islands with the most biodiverse tropical forests found on Earth and home to endangered orangutans. The wall drawings around this print show further deforestation.

### Labyrinth



In the spring of 2022 A+E worked with the Cathedral community and other volunteers to design, dig and seed a wildflower labyrinth on the South lawn. Here we can see the digging in process, during which a great community of earthworms were uncovered – already and continuously engaged in the work of soil regeneration. The labyrinth has been lovingly tended and is now flourishing, enjoyed by a great number of human visitors and pollinating insects. Some of the wildflowers that are presently blooming in the labyrinth are shown growing on the walls of this installation. Visitors are also invited to a sit in the Chapter House and create a wildflower drawing of their own. (This on the paper provided; not on walls, please!) Or you can take a drawing board and materials to draw in the labyrinth.

### Climate Refugees



This image shows the artists' son, Ben, as a baby, held within an awareness of the humanitarian refugee crisis.

In 2015 a photo was published in papers across the world of the small body of 2 year old Alan Kurdi – a Syrian refugee found dead on a Turkish beach, after he drowned on 2nd September. Kurdi's family attempted to cross the Mediterranean sea, from Turkey to Greece, in an inflatable dinghy designed for 8 but carrying 16. The photograph of Kurdi's body caused a dramatic upturn in international concern over the refugee crisis, and made a lasting impression on Sarah – making tangible the humanity of the individuals squeezed onto small boats to make perilous journeys in the hope of a better life. In 2019 our son was born, and watching him sleep often brought to Sarah's mind Alan Kurdi. Holding Ben in this image is a call to recognise our common humanity.

People become refugees for many reasons, including global conflicts and economic inequalities, but climate change is already a major cause of human displacement throughout the world, a situation that is predicted to escalate as the world warms and weather patterns become more volatile. Returning from Pilgrimage for COP26, Jonathan recognised the need to address the reality of climate migration in the context of the A+E programme. In 2023, the first English language class for local asylum seekers was established in the Chapter House – this with the support of Sarah Tolley and other volunteers. This is the first step in what we hope will be a wider programme of support and mutual learning. This print shows the Cathedral as a place of refuge and regeneration in these turbulent times.

The lines of water flowing onto the walls refer to the sea above the organ in Phoebe Ann Traquair's Song School murals.

## Little Earthlings



In 2022 Little Earthlings, a group for toddlers and their carers, met fortnightly in the grounds of the Cathedral for nature play, song and gardening. Here they are shown making a bean tepee – the first gesture in creating the Cathedral's community garden. Development of the community garden was held up by planning permission processes, but it's now set to commence in September. The community garden is envisioned to be a place for plants and humans of all ages to grow together in mutual support – here symbolised by the construction of a bean tepee.

Beside this print we see the artist, Karen Spy, walking and playing her drum in 2022, whilst a visitor lies within her enormous, hollow, elm log, *Arbor Vitae*, temporarily installed in the grounds of the Cathedral. Visitors were invited to enter the log and dream-vision ways in which the Cathedral might become a site of transformation and regeneration for both the human and more-than-human world. Below this is teasel and field scabius, currently growing around the labyrinth. To the right is a drawing of some of the COP26 pilgrims gathering to cook together after a long day's walk. Below this are scallop shells – a symbol of pilgrimage.

## Octopus



This image asks a question of how we relate to the more-than-human world. Here human hands and octopus arms are reaching out to one another as equals – reframing our relationship with other creatures as co-habitors and collaborators in the world we share. Awareness of the extraordinary intelligence of the octopus has been growing in recent years, calling into question culinary, fishing and farming practices. Connecting with the octopus could play an important role in turning the tables on how we relate to the creatures who share our world.

As the sea warms octopus populations are also migrating north, bringing a significant increase in populations to Scottish waters. The warming seas are also causing large-scale bleaching of coral reefs globally. The wall drawing around this print show divers exploring the bleached corals of the Great Barrier Reef as part of projects working to regenerate and build resilience in the reefs.

Below the coral and Octopus print is a cabinet of artefacts (or relics) gathered during the Pilgrimage for COP26.