How can art be used to enhance teaching and learning in Old Testament modules in the Common Awards programmes?

The aim of this project was to investigate the distinctive contribution that art could make to the teaching and learning of the Old Testament. It involved an exploration of different ways in which art could be used to support the teaching and learning of particular Common Awards modules. The research was undertaken with staff and students from the Cambridge Theological Federation (CTF) and St Mellitus, with resources and feedback from Dr Alison Gray (Westminster College), Dr Philip Jenson (Ridley Hall), Dr Naomi Wormell (Westcott House) and Dr Mark Scarlata (St Mellitus). Further resources were developed by Dr Alison Gray and Dr Ayla Lepine (Art Historian).

Research questions
1. How is art currently being used to support the teaching and learning of the Old Testament in Common Awards modules?
2. Are there particular hermeneutical questions which the use of art helps to explore in a unique way, which can be used to significantly enhance the teaching of Old Testament modules? E.g. how do particular pieces of art open up questions of biblical interpretation which are otherwise difficult to communicate?
3. How do students respond to art as a medium of teaching and learning in particular modules?

Methods
In each case, the tutor included a piece (or pieces) of art in their lesson, with specific learning objectives in mind. Questionnaires were given to tutors and to 86 students in the CTF, which contained a mixture of Likert-scale type questions and free questions. The results of these were collated and discussed with the tutors.

Findings

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1. Do you usually find it easier to learn when a teacher uses: (tick all that apply)	
a) Discussions, question and answer sessions	82%
b) Handouts with readings, explanations and book recommendations	71%
c) Pictures, diagrams, charts and graphs	73%
d) Demonstrations, models, role-play and practical sessions	47%

2. Was the lecture/class a positive learning experience?
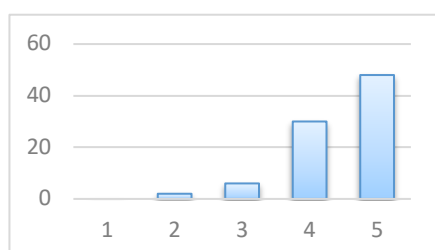
3. Did the art add to your learning experience?
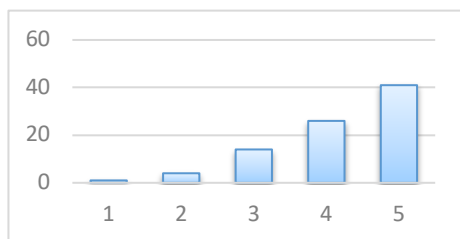
4. Would you like it if art was used more often in teaching Old Testament modules?
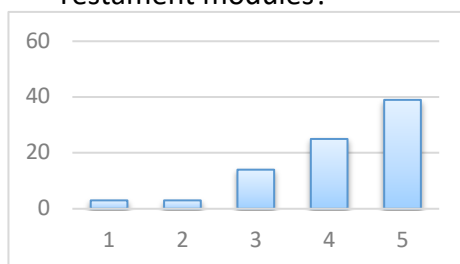
Open questions:
1. Was anything easier to understand / process because of what was represented visually?
2. Did the artwork open up more questions about the topic?
3. Was the artwork well connected to the topic of the lecture?

There was such a fascinating range of responses, which cannot be adequately represented here. However, for a number of students, the experience of using art alongside questions of biblical interpretation was more engaging for them, and allowed them to use their imaginations whilst reading the text. Several students commented that the art provoked questions about the text that would not have otherwise occurred to them. Students described a 'buzz' in the room during the discussions of the artistic representations of the text and how depictions of biblical scenes 'slowed the text down', so that they could appreciate elements of the text that had previously overlooked. All the tutors agreed that it was hugely beneficial to incorporate art in their biblical modules, that it was enjoyable and created a positive atmosphere in the classroom. All the tutors found that the class discussions were much richer in terms of student engagement with the text, their insights into the text and its ambiguities, and their openness to a range of interpretations.

Resources created
The following resources have been created for biblical tutors and will be available on the Common Awards website.
- A guide to using art in teaching Biblical modules
- A resource sheet for using art in teaching (generally)
- Lesson-plan ideas for UG Common Awards modules, three of which connect to short videos available on YouTube (see below)

- Three short videos (on YouTube) discussing three different artworks and their interpretation of biblical texts
- A series of videos of Westminster chapel stained glass windows, which depict biblical scenes and themes, with accompanying teaching and discipleship resources to accompany these.