

Frank Brangwyn
Stations of the Cross



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LISS FINE ART

Preface

This publication – which has been made possible entirely through the generosity of Tigger Hoare – was prompted by the discovery of a complete set of Brangwyn’s *Stations of the Cross*, painted in oil, which originally hung in St Michael’s Abbey, Farnborough. The participation of the Diocese of London has added a dimension which Brangwyn himself would have relished. Although brought up a Catholic, his faith was a strong belief in Christian values rather than an adherence to one particular creed and he told a friend that ‘Life here is nothing without God. The time comes when one has to leave it all, then one says to oneself what can I say I have done to please Him?’

In his own self-effacing way Brangwyn did much to please Him. Quite apart from the *Stations of the Cross*, which are the subject of this catalogue, he also produced in oil a set for Father Thomas Ryan’s leper mission in Pretoria (1920-22), another for Arras Cathedral (1920-24) in memory of those who fell during The Great War, and a series in woodcut (1934-35). He designed the magnificent murals for St Aidan’s church, Leeds and painted *Last Supper* murals for the Marist College, Middlesbrough (1937-45) and St Joseph’s, Stokesley (1946). He produced over 70 illustrations for a projected *Life of St Francis*, 33 etchings for the *Book of Job*, covers for four of Hugh Redwood’s evangelising books and 73 etchings for *L’Ombre de la Croix* (1931), a book about the life of Jews in contemporary Europe.

Many of the works he produced for religious institutions were given free of charge, as were the poster designs he made for charitable societies during The Great War. His generosity knew no bounds, helping family and friends and setting up ‘The Lucy Brangwyn Homes’ in Ditchling which were intended for parish residents over the age of 50 – religious background was not a criterion for choosing residents. He also believed that art was not just for the privileged few, but for everyone to enjoy. To this end he



The 8th Station (detail)

argued passionately for free access to exhibitions and donated over £3,000,000 worth of art (in today’s value) to museums in this country and abroad, especially to galleries in depressed areas. Together with A H Mackmurdo and Walter Spradbery he set up the William Morris Gallery in Walthamstow which he described as ‘a humble offering to the people [of Walthamstow] in the hope that they will enjoy art and remember Morris’.

The survival of the original preparatory sketches for the *Stations*, on tracing paper (1, 5, 8, 14, 17, 24 and 25) and zinc (3, 16), offers a rare insight into Brangwyn’s working methods, (a subject discussed in Dr. Horner’s accompanying essay). The *Stations* also attest to Brangwyn’s love of experimentation as well as his conviction that conventional boundaries between the fine and decorative arts were unimportant. In addition to the unique set of *Stations* in this catalogue, which are painted over a partly drawn and printed base, Brangwyn produced two sets printed directly onto sycamore. Additionally, the lithographic prints, produced in a limited edition of 16, were subsequently published as an easily affordable book in a smaller format with a foreword by G K Chesterton.

A giant of twentieth century art, admired by luminaries such as Kandinsky, Klimt, Toulouse-Lautrec, Tiffany and Bonnard, Brangwyn remains today a figure who has never managed to reclaim the space which for the first half of the twentieth century he largely occupied on the International stage. There are many reasons why Brangwyn remains out of vogue today – he was a maverick and he was prolific and his work refuses to be easily categorized. The heightened drama and saturated palette which defines most of his work are qualities that are especially evident in the *Stations*. Pushed to their emotional breaking point, the compositions seem barely contained within their one meter format and demand from the viewer some kind of participation. It is telling that in so many of these *Stations* Brangwyn included his own portrait, not as one of the fainting spectators on the side lines, but as a main participant at the centre of this drama (see front cover). Brangwyn’s contribution to the revival of religious art during the interwar years is a subject that deserves reassessment.

Tigger Hoare, Sacha Llewellyn & Paul Liss

Foreword

Through the church seasons of Lent and Easter 2015, fourteen images depicting the *Stations of the Cross*, created by Brangwyn in the mid 1930s, will be displayed in St John at Hackney church, in a project collaboration between St John’s, the Diocese of London and Liss Fine Art, made possible through the generosity of Tigger Hoare.

The season of Lent is a period when church members reflect individually on their own lives, trying to take stock of the highs and lows, the rights and wrongs. Lent mirrors the forty days when the bible tells us that Jesus withdrew to the wilderness, alone, to wrestle with his own demons, as a preparation for his own trial and execution.

The origins of *Stations of the Cross* go back to pilgrimage ways in the Holy Land itself, where pilgrims traced the route of Jesus’s last journey on the ground, halting at each site where an incident is recounted in the bible.

Moving from one site to the next assisted pilgrims in their experience of the stories associated with them. Gradually over time the Christian Church brought this pilgrimage experience out of the Holy Land, first to full-scale translations of the “Via Sacra”, and then into individual church buildings in microcosm, as stations of the cross.

In the earlier history of the Church of England the use of images as a support for worship was controversial. The Christian church from its earliest times has been characterized by periods of rich imagery followed by periods of iconoclasm; the Church of England has not been immune to this. From the mid-19th century the Church of England has increasingly embraced the use of imagery as an aid to worship.

St John-at-Hackney was at the centre of a movement key to the re-emergence of orthodox Christian liturgical practices in the Church of England. From about 1805 the Hackney Phalanx, what was then known as a “High Church” movement in the church, promoted some of the more “Catholick” traditions enshrined in the Book of Common Prayer, from its various bases in the Hackney.

At that time *Stations of the Cross* would still have been seen as dangerously Roman Catholic, but the members of the Phalanx, and their publication *The British Critic: A New Review*, had begun a process of reaffirming traditional ecclesiology, which seems inevitably to have led to a similar re-examination of liturgies, including, ultimately, the introductions of stations of the cross into many Church of England churches.

St John at Hackney today is again a beacon for a new movement within the Church of England. The church building remains in regular use for services, traditional and contemporary in style. The church is also used regularly for non-church events, cultural, community and commercial. There is no longer a clear dividing line between the two; they are all ways of being church in London in the 21st century.



Frank Brangwyn,
Cross, c.1919,
Woodcut, signed in pencil,
2 5⁄8 x 2 3⁄8 in (6.7 x 6 cm)

This exhibition illustrates that in a very pleasing way. The Stations will be in liturgical use by the church congregation for their individual reflections on the life of Jesus; at the same time the images will be visited by art lovers for their own reflections on the genius of Brangwyn; both will be undertaking pilgrimages in their own way, moving through the building, moving through the church year, moving through their own lives, moving the church and the community closer together.

This new model of integration is one that the Diocese of London is seeking to introduce to new communities in regeneration areas across London, with several new church buildings already under construction and one hundred new worshipping communities planned to be in place by 2020. This exhibition is a welcome reminder that art and religion are mutually enriching aspects of society.

Geoffrey Hunter



I



II



III



IV



V



VI



VII

Frank Brangwyn – *The Stations of the Cross*

By Libby Horner

In the early 1930s Frank Brangwyn told William de Belleruche that he had been ‘thinking of making a set of *The Stations of the Cross* in lithography. A subject I’ve had at the back of my mind all my life...I’ve always wanted to do this, and have thought about it for years.’ He thought that lithography was a ‘medium which would suit the work and lend itself to dramatic treatment – would make people realise the great tragedy – stir up their religious beliefs, their emotions’.¹ Brangwyn began the series in 1934, drawing his designs on tracing paper (1, 5, 8, 14, 17, 24 and 25). The drawings were then transferred to zinc lithographic plates by rubbing the back of the paper with red conté and tracing the outline of the image.² Brangwyn worked on the zinc plates using a combination of lithographic chalk and etching tools, employing a variety of different methods to gain the exact effect and tonality he required.

The series was printed in February 1935. Appreciating that *The Stations* would be placed on damp church walls, and having always been keen on innovatory techniques, Brangwyn chose to print two sets on sycamore which are now in the Chapter-Hall of the Benedictine Abbey of St André, Zevenkerken, Bruges and in the Chapel of the Jesuit College, Campion Hall, Oxford where they form an integral part of the wood panelling. A further 16 sets were printed on paper and in 1935 the series was reproduced in a smaller format in *The Way of the Cross. An Interpretation by Frank Brangwyn RA*, with a commentary by Gilbert Keith Chesterton, who termed Brangwyn ‘one of the most masculine of modern men of genius’.³ As far as is known only one of the 16 lithographic sets was coloured and this was presented to St Michael’s Abbey, Farnborough in the 1950s, de-accessioned in 2012.

Mounted on a grained surface, recalling the series printed on sycamore, the colouring of these lithographs shows a variety of different techniques from impasto to extensive cross-hatching. The hand of Brangwyn is evident in all of the stations though some panels might have been coloured up with the help of assistants, such as Kenneth Center. The finished works are bold, colourful, energetic and spell-binding.

Brangwyn was brought up as Catholic, his father having converted in about 1858, but he did not attend church regularly. His faith was a belief in Christian values which, as he became older, became interwoven with superstition which is why he included his self-portrait in so many of *The Stations* generally aiding Christ thereby indicating a fear of retribution for past mis-deeds and an effort to ameliorate himself. For example the artist, wearing his habitual waistcoat, appears on Christ’s right side in the 1st Station; he is depicted twice helping take the weight of the cross in the 2nd whilst his

dog Roger lifts a helping paw. Brangwyn takes the part of Simon of Cyrene in the 5th; watches whilst Veronica wipes the face of Jesus in the 6th; is shown twice unrobing Christ in the 10th; unusually seems to be hammering a nail into Jesus’ right hand in the 11th and is one of the crowd looking up in awe in the 12th where Christ appears to stare directly into the artist’s eyes, perhaps questioning his faith. In the 13th Station Brangwyn takes the weight of Christ’s body and holds the ladder steady whilst in the 14th Station he ministers to the body.

The Stations follow the tradition of the Flemish painters with whose work Brangwyn would have been familiar having been born in Bruges. The clothing is contemporary which gives the work immediacy, suggesting that the tragedy of the Calvary is never-ending. One is drawn into the story by the strength and proximity of the characters – the viewer is made to ‘feel the tragedy as if he were an eye-witness’.⁴ As Chesterton points out, ‘every face is different; and every face is vigorous, with an ugly energy that is more attractive than vulgar beauty’.⁵ The man holding the cross in the 5th Station has almost simian features, the praying girl and toddler in the 8th catch our heart-strings, Christ’s mother in the 14th is composed and we admire her restrained pain whilst in the 13th Station Brangwyn himself experiences the weight and enormity of what has occurred. In direct contrast to the bustling crowd is the pale, spiritual, enigmatic figure of Christ, who, as Chesterton points out, is thereby isolated, ‘it does really make the central figure distinguished, in the exact sense of distinct’.⁶

When *The Way of the Cross* was published, bringing Brangwyn’s *Stations* to a wider audience than would otherwise have been possible, one critic noted the ‘robust humanity, decorative invention, and the technical powers’ of the work, observing that ‘of the whole-hearted sincerity and pictorial force of Mr Brangwyn’s interpretation there can be no question’.⁷

NOTES

1 William de Belleruche, *Brangwyn Talks*, London: Chapman and hall, 1946 (1944), p20.
2 This is the only instance I have found of Brangwyn workng on zinc for lithographic work – he generally used stone.
3 GK Chesterton, ‘Commentary’, *The Way of the Cross. An Interpretation by Frank Branguyn RA*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1935, p11. A limited edition of 250 signed and numbered copies was issued in the autumn of 1935 at a cost of seven guineas.
4 Herbert Furst, *The Decorative Art of Frank Branguyn*, London: John Lane The Bodley Head Ltd, 1924, p148.
5 GK Chesterton, p13.
6 GK Chesterton, p15.
7 ‘The Way of the Cross’, unknown newspaper cutting, 5 December 1935.



VIII



IX



X



XI



XII



XIII



XIV



1 **The 1st Station: Jesus is Condemned to Death,**
Pencil on tracing paper, 29 x 33 ½ in. (73.7 x 85.1cm)



2 **The 1st Station: Jesus is Condemned to Death,**
Hand painted in oil over lithograph, laid on board, 33 ½ x 35 ⅝ in. (85 x 90.5 cm)

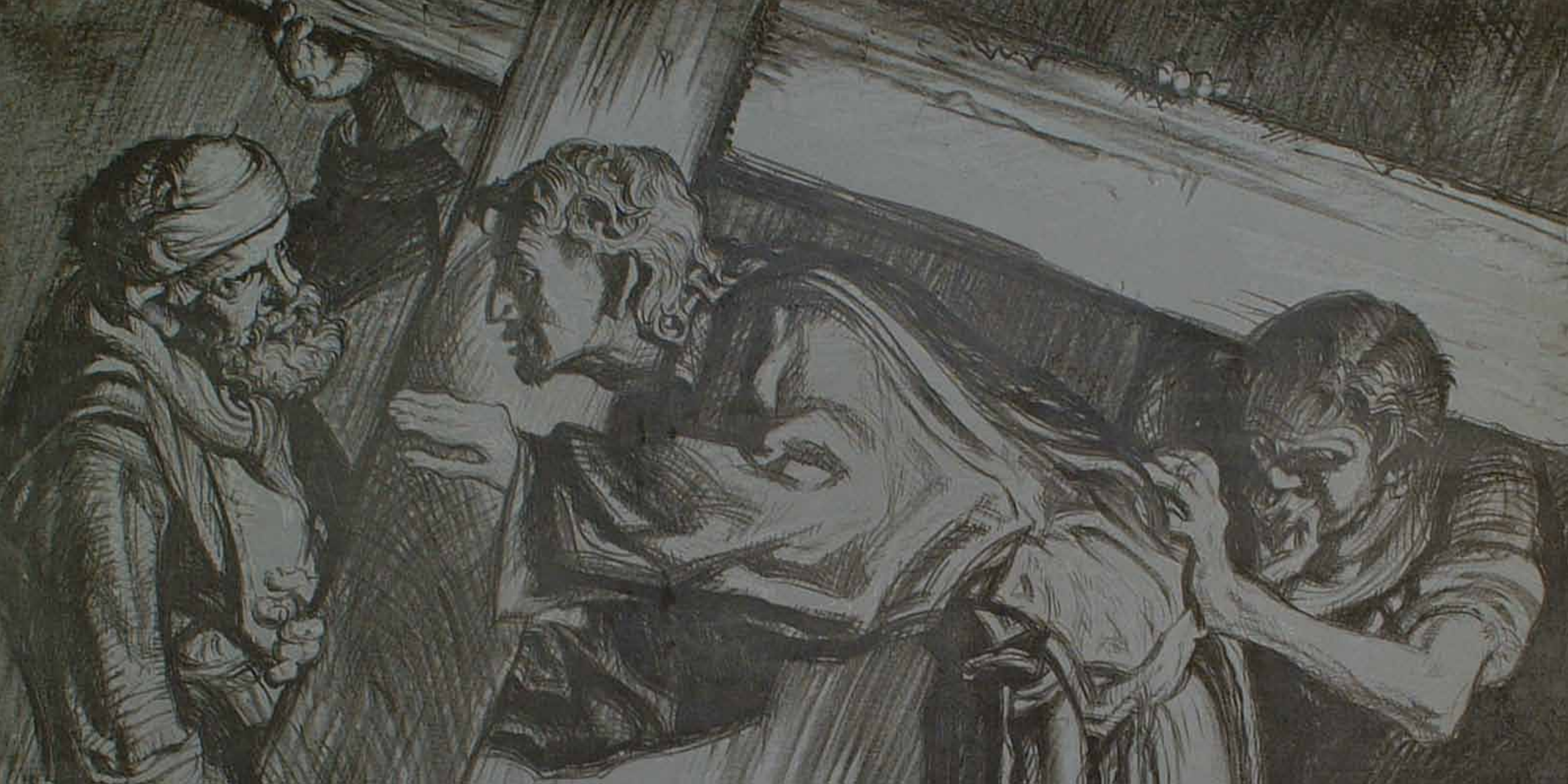
II



3 **The 2nd Station: Jesus Carries His Cross,**
Original zinc lithographic plate, 30 x 32 in. (76.2 x 81.3 cm), signed with monogram
Page 14-15: detail



4 **The 2nd Station: Jesus Carries His Cross,**
Hand painted in oil over lithograph, laid on board, 33 ½ x 35 ⅞ in. (85 x 90.5 cm)



III



5 **The 3rd Station: Jesus Falls the First Time,**
Pencil on tracing paper, 29 x 33 ½ in. (73.7 x 85.1cm)



6 **The 3rd Station: Jesus Falls the First Time,**
Hand painted in oil over lithograph, laid on board, 33 ½ x 35 ⅝ in. (85 x 90.5 cm)



IV



7 **The 4th Station: Jesus Meets His Mother,**
Hand painted in oil over lithograph, laid on board, 33 ½ x 35 ⅝ in. (85 x 90.5 cm) Left: detail



8 **The 5th Station: Simon of Cyrene Helps Jesus Carry the Cross,**
Pencil on tracing paper, 29 x 33 ½ in. (73.7 x 85.1cm)



9 **The 5th Station: Simon of Cyrene Helps Jesus Carry the Cross,**
Hand painted in oil over lithograph, laid on board, 33 ½ x 35 ⅝ in. (85 x 90.5 cm)

VI



10 The 6th Station: Veronica Wipes the Face of Jesus,
Hand painted in oil over lithograph, laid on board, 33 ½ x 35 ⅝ in. (85 x 90.5 cm)

VII



11 The 7th Station: Jesus Falls the Second Time,
Hand painted in oil over lithograph, laid on board, 33 ½ x 35 ⅝ in. (85 x 90.5 cm)



13 **Jesus Falls Below the Cross**, 1916,
Print, 7 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 15 $\frac{1}{8}$ in. (19.8 x 38.5 cm)

12 **Jesus Falls Below the Cross**, 1916,
Original woodblock, 7 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 15 $\frac{1}{8}$ in. (19.8 x 38.5 cm)



14 **The 8th Station: Jesus Meets the Women of Jerusalem,**
Pencil on tracing paper, 29 x 33 ½ in. (73.7 x 85.1cm)



15 **The 8th Station: Jesus Meets the Women of Jerusalem,**
Hand painted in oil over lithograph, laid on board, 33 ½ x 35 ⅞ in. (85 x 90.5 cm) Following pages: detail





16 **The 9th Station: Jesus Falls the Third Time**,
Signed with monogram,
Original zinc lithographic plate,
30 x 32 in. (76.2 x 81.3 cm),



17 **The 9th Station: Jesus Falls the Third Time**,
Pencil on tracing paper, 29 x 33 ½ in. (73.7 x 85.1cm)

IX



18 **The 9th Station: Jesus Falls the Third Time**,
Hand painted in oil over lithograph, laid on board, 33 ½ x 35 ⅝ in. (85 x 90.5 cm)



19 **The 10th Station: Jesus is Stripped of His Garments,**
Hand painted in oil over lithograph, laid on board, 33 ½ x 35 ⅞ in. (85 x 90.5 cm)



20 *Figure Studies, study for Crucifixion,*
Black chalk on tracing paper, 17 ¾ x 21 in. (44 x 53.5 cm)

XI



21 **The 11th Station: Jesus is Nailed to the Cross,**
Hand painted in oil over lithograph, laid on board, 33 ½ x 35 ⅝ in. (85 x 90.5 cm)

XII



22 **The 12th Station: Jesus Dies on the Cross,**
Hand painted in oil over lithograph, laid on board, 33 ½ x 35 ⅝ in. (85 x 90.5 cm)

XIII



23 **The 13th Station: Jesus is Taken Down from the Cross,**
Hand painted in oil over lithograph, laid on board, 33 ½ x 35 ⅝ in. (85 x 90.5 cm)



24 **The 13th Station: Jesus is Taken Down from the Cross,**
Pencil on tracing paper, 29 x 33 ½ in. (73.7 x 85.1cm)



25 **The 14th Station: Jesus is Laid in the Tomb,**
Pencil on tracing paper, 29 x 33 ½ in. (73.7 x 85.1cm)



26 **The 14th Station: Jesus is Laid in the Tomb,**
Hand painted in oil over lithograph, laid on board, 33 ½ x 35 ⅞ in. (85 x 90.5 cm)



LISS FINE ART

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Founded in 1991 by Paul Liss and Sacha Llewellyn, Liss Fine Art specialises in the unsung heroes and heroines of British art from 1880 to 1980. During the last 20 years Liss Fine Art has worked in association with museums to develop a series of in-depth exhibitions to encourage the reappraisal of some of the lesser known figures of 20th century British Art.

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