

ART APPRECIATION GROUP July 24 – Report by Tony Seward

On 3 July we visited the Auckland Project, first assembling at the Tower to collect tickets and orient ourselves for the day ahead. 11 members had decided to take up the discounted group offer for the Universal Pass, which gives entry to all the museums and gardens for a year; others already had a variety of concessionary passes. Armed with these, we were then free to explore the Faith Museum, the Mining Art Gallery, the Spanish Gallery, the Castle (including the Zurbarans) and the newly opened Walled Gardens. This is a lot to take in in one visit, so we each had to decide which to focus on, and which to leave for another day.

The temptation is to try to do too much, and it's worth making time for strategic breaks in one of the good range of eateries available.

The weather was kind, so most of us took a turn around the impressively planted and landscaped walled gardens, recreated from the 18th century originals and including a new glasshouse. Interesting fact: the garden has its own microclimate, with a temperature difference of up to 3 degrees centigrade between the bottom and the top of the steeply sloping site.



Gatehouse, glasshouse and Faith Museum from the walled gardens

Many were already familiar with the Spanish Art Gallery, although it is worth noting that there have been significant changes since it first opened, partly in response to criticisms from visitors. The Mining Art Gallery is always popular, being closest to the life experiences of the local community, but the major new kid on the block is the recently opened Faith Museum. With a wealth of carefully chosen objects, many on long loan from other national and regional museums, it traces the history of religion and its impact on British history from prehistory to the present. It is expertly curated and attractively presented, if a little overwhelming, definitely needing more than one visit.



Lily Crucifix, linking the Annunciation and Crucifixion, from the Morton Frontal (15th century)

Indeed, the whole of this remarkable destination is constantly changing, so it's well worth making regular visits to keep up with the latest developments

There was no meeting in August. We will resume on 4 September at 2 p.m. in Enterprise House, and start to explore the history of British art.