

Whilst increasingly rarefied in practice, the role of art for the modern church continues to be explored, questioned and debated, yet its application is often poles apart; divided between the imposition of an externally referenced monument to a known artist that risks transforming the sacred space into gallery and the overly inward-looking community/ folk art/craft generated through engagement with a small section of the congregation that reflects ideas of the Church as a narrow community facility. Knight's research through varied modes of practice, partnership and co-creation methodologies explore a sense of place and ownership within a broader understanding of community without losing sight of the core functioning of the building as a site of worship.

By expanding the understanding of a religious life as lived through the public vehicle of the church's greater architecture, Knight's works enter an intimate material conversation with the liturgical and ceremonial life of the church.

Through breaking out beyond representational convention, the series taken together enters a wider debate in the US and specifically in New York City about memorial sculptures, about what we might choose to memorialise, where and how, and the place of the Church in that public conversation. This research produced three artefacts all in situ at the Church of Transfiguration and St Mary Church New York. 'Our Father' 2014; in celebration of Father Felix Varela, the Cuban-born priest who founded the parish of the Church of Transfiguration in 1827, 'Gentle Rain of Mercy', 2016; representing the internal, personal and intimate and 'Lux Mundi' 2020; the threshold, the entrance to sanctuary.



Above: 'Our Father' Church of Transfiguration
New York City. 2014



Above: [View PDF detailing 3 artifacts](#)

The research centers around a series of 3 commissioned artifacts that enabled the time, resource and circumstance to build a dialogue between artist & collaborator and congregation & Church.



Above and left: Three interrelated artifacts funded by Archdiocese of New York, Chris Knight/Si Applied Ltd, Sheffield. Total Funding £99,500.00

Building on an established relationship with Fr. Andrew O'Connor dating back some 25 years, Knight encouraged this enquiry to be a fully collaborative process between artist and usergroup, namely here the church community. The resulting series of works expand on a longstanding studio research enquiry that uses the production of site specific contemporary artefacts as a way of creating refreshed discourse about society, religion, ritual practice and belief.

Responding to, and drawing reference from, the narrative surrounding the 'troubled and deeply conflicted' relationship between church and art (Burch Brown 2003, Koestle-Cate 2016, Mennekes 2000 et al) and the desire to create work that transcends material concern (Adjaye 2016, Saumarez Smith 2016). This research seeks to explore methods of creating and placing art within the sacred space where it is understood 'For men do not easily abandon what long custom has consecrated' (Gore 1889).

Whilst Father O'Connor approaches such commissions as needing to be 'A necessary provocation of tradition, announcing the whole canon of tradition to still be alive', (Knight 2008) a dialogue was established where Father O'Connor served as conduit to a community he knows intimately and Knight with his established history of church commissions began an open and creative discussion that allowed Knight to finesse his studio research questions in open conversation with the core public the resulting works would ultimately serve. This process allowed Knight to produce works that while communicating to the widest of New York publics also preserve a special intimacy for the work's primary users, the everyday congregation.



Above: [View PDF detailing Dialogue and Community](#)



Above: [View PDF detailing Collaborative Design and Making](#)

Adjaye, D. (2016) *Constructed Narratives: Essays and Projects*. Lars Muller.

Birch Brown, F. (2003) *Good Taste, Bad Taste, and Christian Taste: Aesthetics in Religious Life*. Oxford University Press.

Gore, C. (1889) *Lux Mundi: A Series of Studies in the Religion of the Incarnation*. John Murray.

Knight, C. (2008) *Interview with Fr. A. O'Connor, The Language of Form*, DVD.

Koestle-Cate, J. (2016) *Art and the Church: A fractious Embrace: Ecclesiastical Encounters with Contemporary Art*. Routledge.

Mennekes, F. (2000) *Between Doubt and Rapture – Art And Church Today: The Spiritual In The Art Of The Twentieth Century*. Religion and the Arts Volume 4: Issue 2.

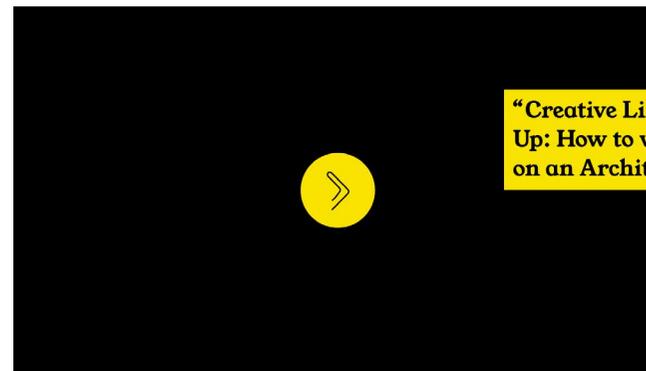
Saumarez Smith, C. (2016) *The Sacred and The Secular In Contemporary Art*. Standpoint, Social Affairs Unit Magazines Ltd.



Research outcomes have been disseminated through the public realm and primarily Catholic or Cuban publications in the USA. The enquiry, artefacts and/or methodology were articulated through the group exhibition 'Resonance: Making Metal and Place' at Contemporary Applied Arts, London 2015 and several presentations and keynotes including 'Creative Links: Scaling Up' 2019 at The Goldsmiths Centre, London, 'Silver Speaks' symposium, 2017 at the Royal College of Art and the 'Inheritor Dialogue symposium', Yunnan, China (2019).



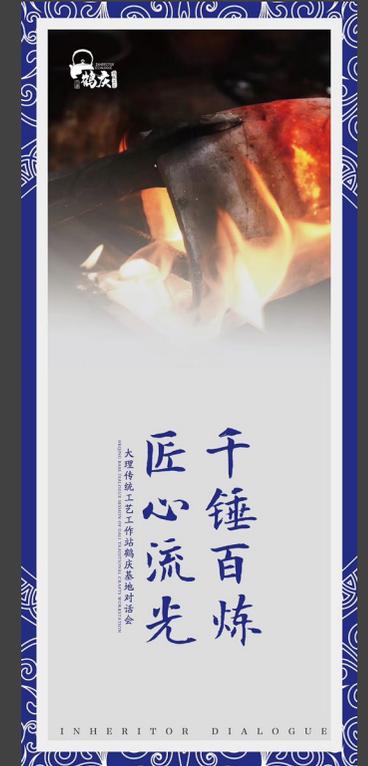
Creative Links: Scaling Up - How to work Bigger and on an Architectural Scale (Bite-Size Film)



“Creative Links - Scaling Up: How to work Bigger and on an Architectural Scale”

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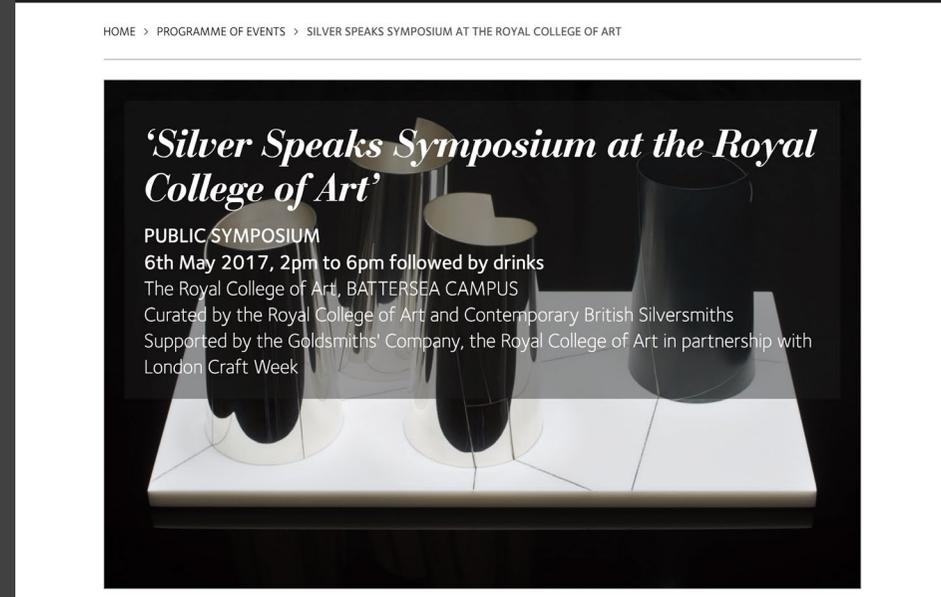
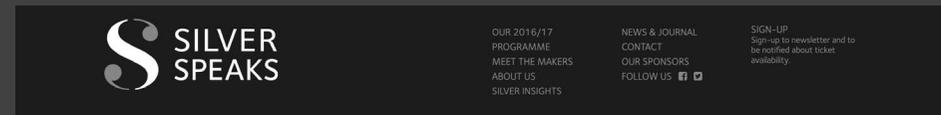
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Inheritor Dialogue symposium, Yunnan, China (2019). Delegates included representatives from the Chinese Ministry of Culture, Inheritors and practitioners of intangible cultural heritage from throughout China, including from the traditional crafts of Yunnan and Dali prefecture, expert scholars, designers and enterprise representatives. Institutions of higher learning and non-relic protection included Central Academy of Fine Arts, Tsinghua University, Zhejiang Normal University, Yunnan College of Art and Yunnan University of Technology.



Contemporary British Silversmiths symposium Silver Speaks, 2017. Supported by The Goldsmiths Company and the Arts Council and hosted by The Royal College of Art, London. Following a presentation by Eric Turner, V&A Curator, on the contribution of silversmiths on the wider design world from a historical perspective, Knight joined a discussion panel, chaired by arts journalist and curator Corinne Julius, exploring design collaborations by silversmiths.



Above: [View PDF of Silver Speaks Symposium website](http://silverspeaks.co.uk/events/silver-speaks-royal-college-art/)




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Adl Toch: Echoes of Process

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Donna Brennan: Hortus

Conclusus

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Emily Jo Gibbs: The Value of Making

Windows onto Making

Still Lifes

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2017

Alan Craxford at 70

COLLECT 2017

Bloomin' Jewels

Community Outreach

Resonance: Making, metal and place

10.09.15 - 24.10.15

Walk down any urban street in the UK and one of the most dominant materials that surrounds you is metal: railings, gates, security fencing, signboards, lampposts, roofing materials, bridges, rail tracks and drain covers. Movement through our towns and cities is, one way or another, shaped by metal.

This exhibition draws attention to eight contemporary designers and makers who have shaped some of these metal environments with particular skill and imagination in recent years.

The common thread is that each trained as a hands-on maker in fields of jewellery and metalwork. Training in the direct craft of fine metalwork on one scale underpins the sensitive, successful designs on another, much larger scale.

The exhibition includes large scale work and photographs of the site-specific projects, which are shown alongside working drawings and information on each commission. Examples of jewellery and domestic silverwork are also displayed. Much of the work in the exhibition is for sale.

CAA maker members John Creed, Katy Hackney and Wendy Ramshaw CBE are joined by guests Linda Brothwell, Steven Follen, Tom Jarvis, Chris Knight and Laura Potter.

The exhibition has been guest-curated by Amanda Game, an independent curator and writer in the field of contemporary applied art and design.



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Writers of the First Coast: Félix Varela

Father Félix Varela (1788-1853), considered the grandfather of Cuban independence and the first Cuban-American writer, grew up here on the First Coast in St. Augustine. Years later, after his fervor for a *Cuba Libre* had forced him to spend most of his life exiled from his homeland, he returned to the ancient city to end his days. Varela's two stints in St. Augustine bookended a remarkable life that saw him become a prominent writer and a respected Catholic priest now on track for sainthood.

August 23, 2018



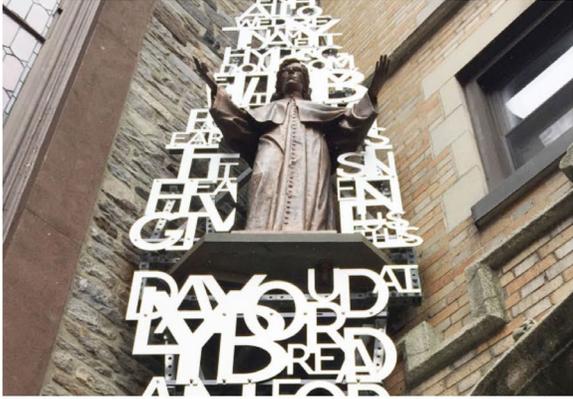
Varela was born in Havana to a Spanish father and a Cuban mother. Both parents had died by the time Varela was six, and he was sent to live with his grandfather, Bartolomé Morales, commander of the Spanish garrison in St. Augustine. Varela grew up in the Castillo San Marcos, and received his early education at the small school headed by the local priest, Michael O'Reilly, the garrison's Irish-born chaplain. It was here on the fringes of the Spanish empire that Varela came to understand life as a colonial subject.

Though he grew up enmeshed in the army life, the pious Varela rejected the opportunity for a military career in favor of the priesthood, saying "my purpose is not to kill men, but to save souls." His grandfather arranged for him to attend San Carlos Seminary in Havana. Varela was ordained a priest in 1811, and subsequently took a faculty position at the seminary. From 1812-1822 he taught several subjects and published textbooks. In 1821 he was selected to represent Cuba in the Cortes, the Spanish parliament. There he proposed that Spain grant Cuba and other colonies their independence. His proposal was ignored and Varela was swept up in the conflict between the Cortes and the king. Varela, disgusted by the crown's treatment of its colonies, found himself accused of treason, and in 1823 he was forced into exile in the United States. He never again in life returned to Cuba.

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New York City

Father Varela Memorial

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Father Félix Varela (1788-1853) arrived in New York in 1823 and, as a defender of immigrant rights, established the Church of Immigrants, later renamed Transfiguration Church, which has continued to serve the communities of Irish, Italian, and, recently, of Chinese immigrants. The Memorial, there, is constituted by a statue of Father Varela surrounded by aluminum letters which together suggest The Lord's Prayer. Discovering the Varela monument in Chinatown illustrates the inexhaustibility of Cuban culture, its uniqueness, in the center of an area known in 1840 as the Five Points, where several waves of immigrants have converged over the years. (25 Mott St., New York)

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Dedication of Father Varela Memorial

Posted Wednesday, April 29, 2015 3:24 pm

In the courtyard of Transfiguration Church and School in

CARDINAL DOLAN

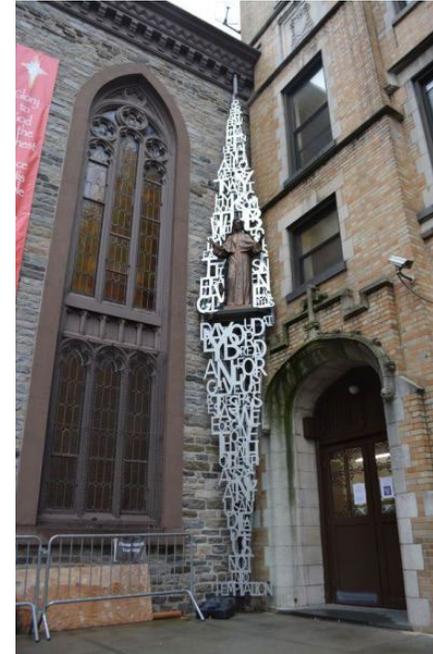


"St. Teresa of Calcutta taught that, if you want joy, spell out the word: 'J comes first, and is for Jesus: put Him first; 'o follows, and indicates others as the

(<https://www.cny.org/stories/lessons-from-21225?>)

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<https://www.cny.org/stories/dedication-of-father-varela-memorial,12608>

New Sculpture Installed at Transfiguration Church



If you frequent Mott Street in Chinatown, you might have noticed a new addition at the Historic [Church of the Transfiguration](#). A new sculpture surrounds the statue commemorating Father Felix Varela, the Cuban-born priest who founded the parish in 1827.

The "Mandorla of Felix Varela" was installed in November. It was commissioned by Rev. Raymond Nobiletti, Transfiguration's pastor. Father Andrew O'Connor of St. Mary's Catholic Church on Grand Street came up with the concept, along with architect Hans Roegle and Chris Knight, a Manchester, England based sculptor.

The almond-shaped piece is made of anodized aluminum. The base is fashioned from black granite from the lot used to build the September 11th Memorial. According to a plaque that will be installed in the next few weeks, the mandorla "signifies to holiness of Varela" and "commands a three-block-long perspective by which the semblance of Chinese language signage gives way to English letters spelling out 'Our Father'"

The plaque notes, "A symbol of political persecution and a beacon of religious freedom, the mandorla is intended to be a scrim for art projection to offer a voice to those who suffer religious and political persecution." Father Varela was a tireless advocate for New York's immigrant communities. In its 200-year history, Transfiguration has served Irish, Italian, Latino and now Chinese New Yorkers.

The church is a city and national historic landmark. The Landmarks Preservation Commission signed off on the addition to the

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<http://www.thelodownny.com/leslog/2014/12/new-sculpture-installed-at-transfiguration-church.html>



Celebrate the Life of Father Félix Varela

founder Church of the Transfiguration
and apostle to American immigrants



Join us for the
dedication and
blessing of the
**Father Varela
Memorial**

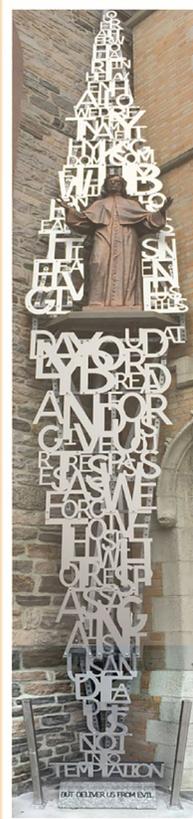
DATE: Sunday, April 26, 2015
TIME: 3:00pm
PLACE: Church of the Transfiguration
29 Mott Street, New York, NY

敬請於本年四月二十六日(星期日)下午三時參
與在紐約勿街29號顯聖容堂為紀念創始人華
利拉神父的生平奉獻及祝聖紀念銅像儀式。

Vamos a celebrar la vida del Padre Félix Varela fundador
de la Iglesia Transfiguración y apóstol de los inmigrantes
de América. Únase con nosotros para la conmemoración y
bendición del Padre Félix Varela Memorial el Domingo,
26 de Abril 2015 a las 3:00 de la tarde en la Iglesia de la
Transfiguración en el 29 de Mott Street, NYC.



Presided over by
**BISHOP
OCTAVIO CISNEROS**
AUXILIARY BISHOP
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'Our Father'



Transfiguration Church

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Father Varela Memorial



Father Félix Varela (1788-1853) arrived in New York in 1823 and, as a defender of immigrant rights, established the Church of Immigrants, later renamed Transfiguration Church, which has continued to serve the communities of Irish, Italian, and, recently, of Chinese immigrants.

The Memorial consists of a statue of Father Varela surrounded by a mandorla of anodized aluminum letters that together spell out The Lord's Prayer. The base of the sculpture is fashioned from black granite from the lot used to build the September, 11th Memorial.

The mandorla was conceived and designed by Father Andrew O'Connor of St. Mary's Catholic Church, architect Hans Roegle and Chris Knight, a Manchester, England based sculptor.

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