

## **John Piper, Interior of Coventry Cathedral, November 15<sup>th</sup> 1940**

### **Martin Roberts, Senior Curator at The Herbert Art Gallery and Museum**

John Piper's painting of the ruins of Coventry Cathedral is one of the most significant pieces in The Herbert's collection. It captures a pivotal moment when the city was changed forever, in ways which are still felt today and still resonate with Coventry people. The destruction of the cathedral during the Blitz of 1940 was an extremely traumatic event, yet it led to the city forging a new identity as city of peace and reconciliation.

The Herbert directly faces the cathedral where the ruins of the bombed medieval building still stand alongside the new building which opened in 1962, and has become a symbol of the city's recovery from the destruction of war. So, there is a very direct connection between the two sites which this painting encapsulates.

Piper's painting is usually on display in The Herbert's permanent Peace and Reconciliation Gallery, which tells the story of what happened in the Blitz and how it eventually led to the cathedral and other organisations working to promote peace and reconciliation around the world. Over the last ten years or so, we've been working to build a unique collection of artworks on themes of conflict, peace and reconciliation and Piper's painting is the cornerstone of this collection.

So, this is an extremely powerful work which represents one of the most important events in the history of Coventry and the lives of its inhabitants. It's a poignant reminder of the destruction inflicted on the city and how the city reinvented itself to play a role in promoting peace around the world, which is something that Coventry people are rightly very proud of.

The Courtauld's National Partners project has been hugely beneficial to The Herbert, in particular it has allowed us to bring some world-famous works of art by the likes of Cezanne and Degas to Coventry, which have been enjoyed and appreciated by our local audiences. It has also encouraged us to look further into the story of the Courtauld's company in Coventry and this has led to some further acquisitions for our social history collection. It has been great to connect with The Courtauld Gallery and with other museums that have a link to Courtauld's.