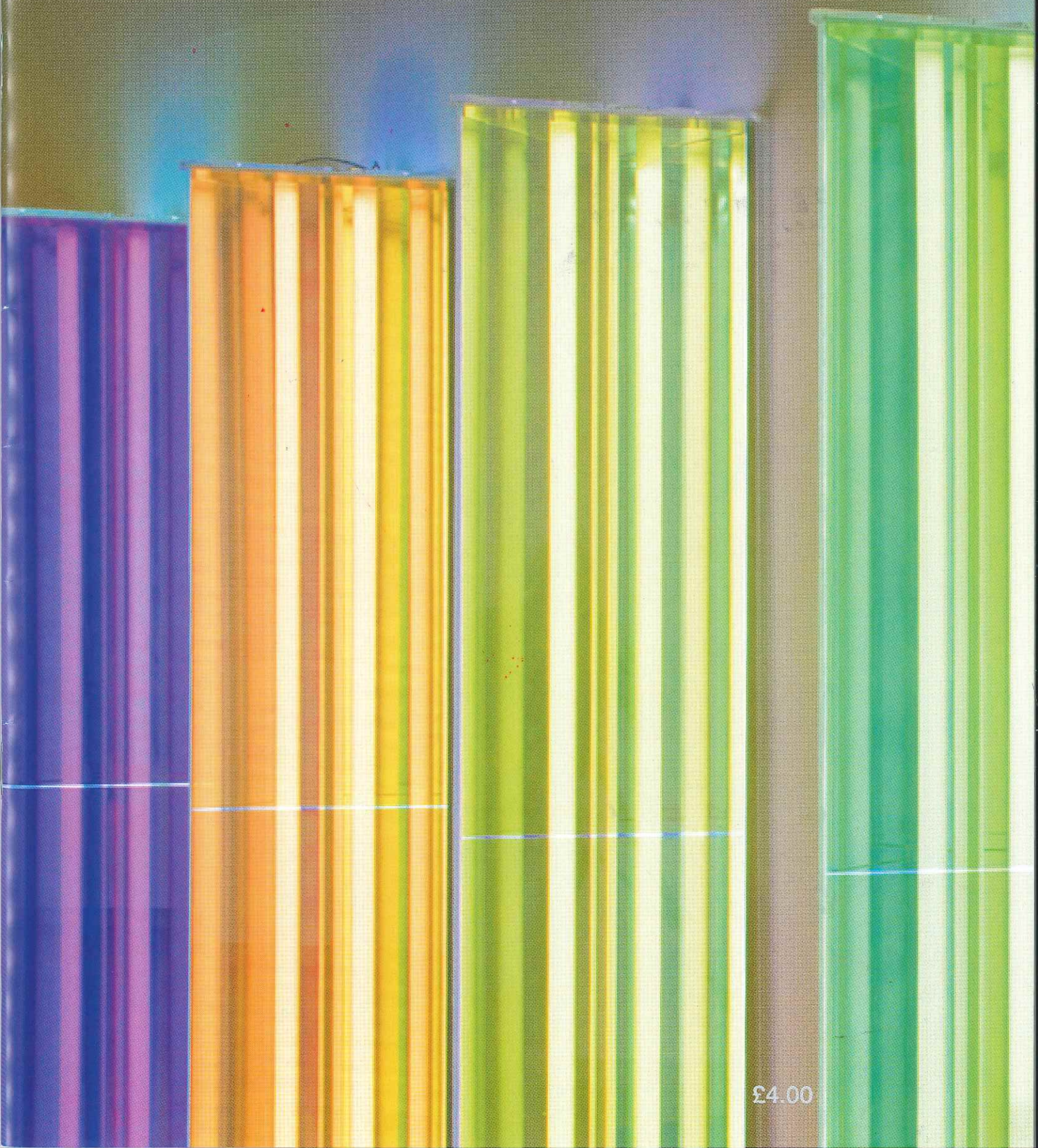


artspace 47



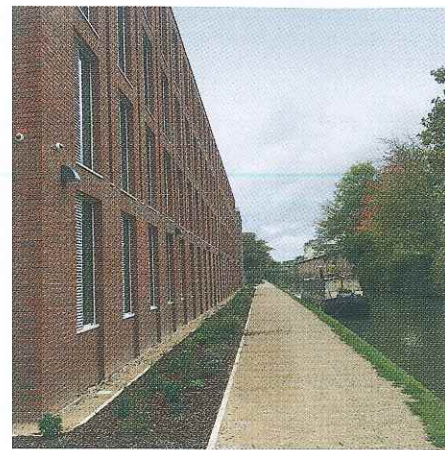
£4.00

Karen Parker

walks us through The Union
and The **Terry Frost Space**

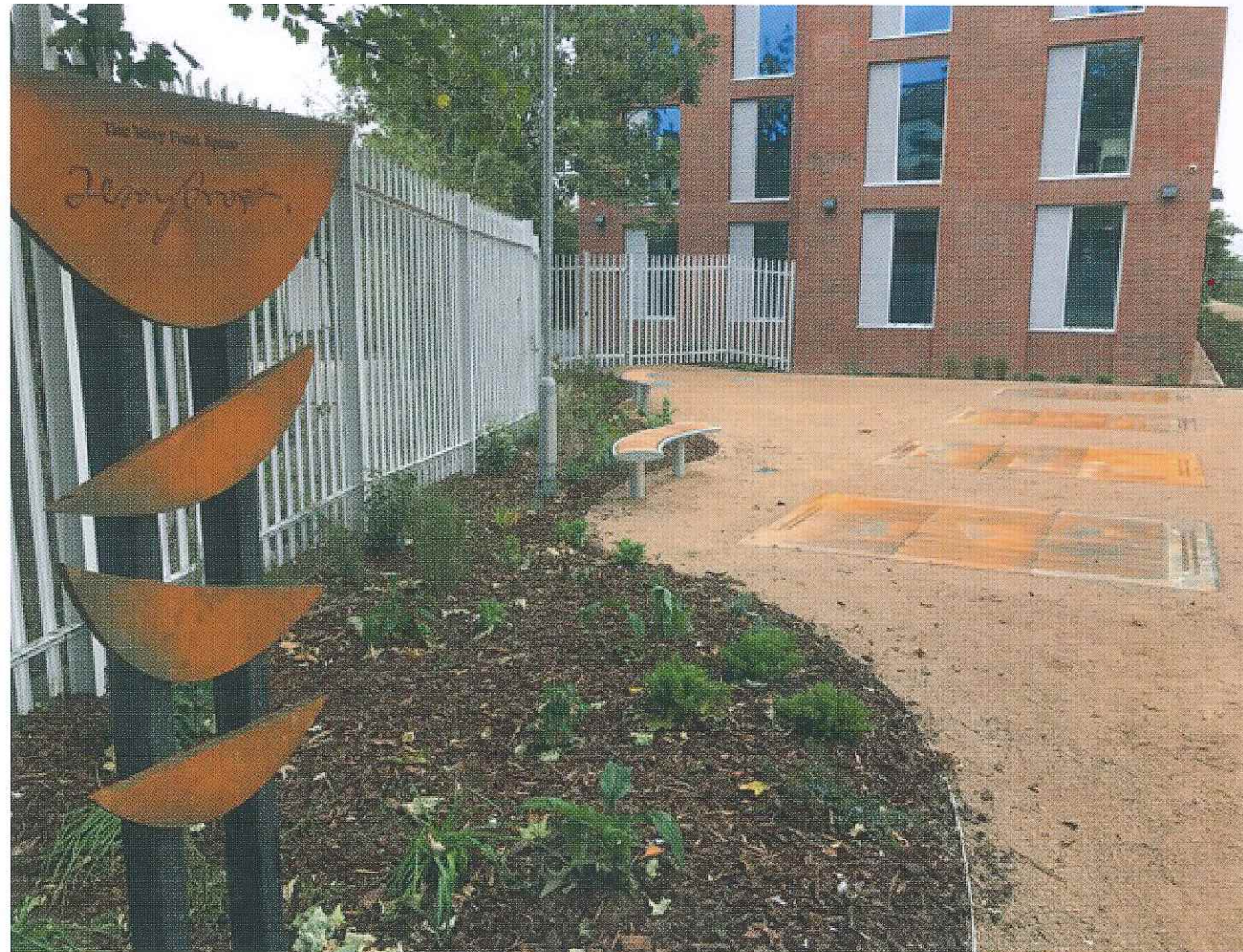
Figure 1. Right: The Union alongside the Grand Union Canal

Figure 2. Below: Cast iron plates of Frost images embedded in the ground
Photo courtesy of Alumno Developments



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Friday 15th September 2017 saw the opening of The Union, a new student accommodation development in Leamington Spa built alongside the Grand Union Canal. Designed by renowned architects Alumno with Glenn Howells Architects and built by Interserve, the Chair of Warwick District Council, Cllr Alan Boad, cut the ribbon to declare the building open. A complex of 187 rooms, some studio apartments and some rooms

sharing kitchen and living areas are for students studying at Warwick and Coventry universities. The building regenerates a formerly neglected part of the old town, rejuvenating the area as students bring new life to enhance the community spirit. The improved access to the canal towpath opens up the canalside for everyone (Fig. 1) with The Terry Frost Space which has Frost works of art embedded in the ground and provides seating and a garden area for the students and the

public to relax in (Fig. 2).

Alumno and Glenn Howells Architects have designed the former abandoned British Telecom storage facility into two four storey buildings for student accommodation. The design echoes a previous industrial era matching the red brick construction of the earlier building, and the factory and former foundry on the opposite side of the canal. Splitting the building into two, using different brick types to distinguish



Figures 3 and 4. Left and below: Design stage with Matthew Jarratt
Photo courtesy of Alumno Developments

them, affords some relief in the view from the canal and towpath outside, and inside provides a reception area and enables the communal areas to look out canalside. The large windows for maximum light also enhance surveillance security for both residents and canal users, but attention to privacy for bedrooms has been considered. Providing a complete package for students including a mix of single and studio apartments they offer an alternative to local housing. Fully managed and accountable to the neighbourhood the development has kept a high priority on enhancing the community. Facilities such as car parking have been considered, a bike hire and storage scheme is planned, and as part of the construction Interserve has made improvements to the canal environment, widening the canal towpath and improving the area with The Terry Frost Space seating and garden, installing the cast iron plates and sign for the pocket park and even considering the needs of canal traffic by installing a water station.

The whole project was committed to including an art commission from the outset and Matthew Jarratt, arts consultant/curator, was approached to design and manage an appropriate artwork with a local connection. Researching Leamington Spa and its history and discovering the work of Sir Terry Frost RA, the internationally renowned abstract artist born in the town, presented a sound proposal for the commission. (Figs. 3 and 4). Liaising extensively with Anthony Frost, Terry's son, images were chosen and an introduction by Anthony to Bob Devereux suggested a mix of art and poetry to illustrate

the connections. Jarratt suggests that his role as broker demands that he works collaboratively so the project "was very much the combination of Anthony's advice, Bob's poetry, design and layout by Founded Design and cast iron by Specialist Castings" and of course the legacy of Terry Frost's artwork.

The poet Bob Devereux was commissioned to produce some poetry to accompany the images, not only on canvas, but also cast in iron. The cast iron was chosen as homage to the industrial and manufacturing area of Leamington Spa where the new accommodation is situated. On the opposite bank of the canal was the Eagle Foundry in Ranelagh Street which became Sydney Flavel and Co

and is now Rangemaster AGA. The reliefs are positioned outside in the garden area with adjacent seating to encourage contemplation. Sited near the canal both the images and the poem are designed to be read from either direction as pedestrians encounter the work walking along the path.

The industrial nature of the ironwork is beautiful as its already rusting patina shines red, vermillion, ochre and charcoal black, changing with the light, the time of day and the weather. Anthony Frost, Terry's son, is delighted with the final effect and was keen to show them at their best at the opening party. Dismayed to see them muddled already he hailed down a passing narrowboat



3

Features

requesting a bucket from the obliging bargee so that he could sluice them down with canal water.

The same images, but this time in Sir Terry's renowned bright colours on canvas, greet any residents or visitors as they adorn the reception area of the building. The cheerful bright splashes of colour complement the cool lines and polished concrete of the space. (Fig. 5). The opening party treated us to Bob reciting his poem from the wall mounted pieces accompanied by Pip Barlow ably improvising on the guitar. They strolled along the hallway and then turned to retrace their steps to emphasise the assertion that the poem was fluent in either direction.



PHOTOGRAPH: KAREN PARKER

musical flow to enhance the piece. Pip was not called upon to repeat his composition in reverse as Bob's poetry had required; the process relied on the random quality of the improvised musical performance. Together they embodied the verse: "Spontaneity gave his work authority. He thought creatively and painted intuitively."

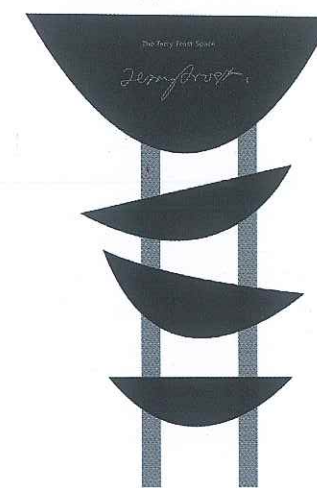
The polished concrete wall accepts the large colourful canvases and the clean cut lines of the space are echoed in the work. Arranged yellow – pink – blue – green from the entrance they suggest a happy, buoyant environment ready for stimulation be it to study or for having fun. See Fig. 6.

The yellow image conjures stylised flowers on stalks, against railings or amongst other plants. Are they behind bars, in front, or interleaved? Maybe they are bowls, falling or floating, or maybe holes to slide into a darker world. The pink image is exasperating in the compulsive desire to match the shapes as if a jigsaw, but they mockingly refuse to cooperate. The hooks either overpower or undercut each other and there is something cheeky and slightly subversive about these shapes as the viewer is challenged to hide and seek with the predominant hook shape receding or advancing. The blue image is reminiscent of water, of shapes floating in lakes, or the sea, but unsettling in the halving of

Figure 5. Far left: Bob Devereux and Pip Barlow

Figures 7 and 8. Right: Orange, Green and Blue Rhythm screenprint 14 colours on Arches paper © Frost Estate

the ripple effect, segments that again cannot be matched, but for me give an impression of reverse motion. In the green image the shapes appear under more control, but have the potential for the stack to collapse. The fragility of life and events stacked seemingly together, but a wobble could be catastrophic. What is held in the bowl shaped vessel, will it survive? Or possibly the shapes are waiting to drift off and fly on an upwards escape route to freedom from restraint. Recognisable as Terry Frost images are reminiscent of the rocking boats of his early work from *Walk Along the Quay* 1950 and his *Vertical Rhythm* and *Frisky* series of 2002 from the final years. The clever juxtaposition of the semi-circles and the straight lines creates the movement, and the four are comfortable companion pieces with variations in the treatment of the



lines and positions. It is remarkable that changing the medium from canvas, paint and vibrant colour, to the tarnished shades of rust on cast iron outside, the images still convey similar notions of space and movement. However, they are physically confined to the cast iron plate and there is a much bolder, heavier claim of art embracing and surviving the ravages of time, of becoming part of the environment. The real opportunity to touch and feel the gravity of the work stamps a new authority to the iron plates and claims a right to be there as part of the industrial and natural landscape. The cast iron sign naming the park is also based on Frost's screenprint *Orange, Green and Blue Rhythm*. The Terry Frost Space is a celebration of public art and creativity for all to enjoy without venturing into

the hallowed space of galleries and studios. (Figs. 7 and 8).

The combined artistic talents of the design of the building, the desire to include art at its inception, the skill of the workforce, consulting expert knowledge and advice, the designers and creators who all, in acknowledging the past, bring a new dimension to the present. The creative imperative to unify the new and the old, resulting in putting a new twist on an existing work of art, and commissioning complementary new work is a testament to the future of revitalising Leamington Spa. Accepting the challenge to not only find living accommodation for an increasing number of students, but also to provide a stimulating and comfortable study environment for the younger generation has to fanfare an optimistic view of the future. Anthony Frost sums up with:

"seeing The Terry Frost Space come to life has been a fantastic experience. Ultimately, what has been produced is a wonderful tribute to Dad's work. Alumno's commitment to bringing art to public spaces – as they have in Leamington – is hugely important. Not only does it make a valuable contribution to the communities they are working with, but it is also a great way of leaving a lasting legacy that celebrates the heritage of the sites they are developing."



Above: Anthony Frost

Figure 6. Left: Reception



*Terry's life was fired in a creative furnace.
This Leamington lad made great art.*

*Art sustained him whilst a prisoner of war.
The camp gave him time to observe and to draw.*

*He stepped free, on discovery's gangplank,
where tethered boats rock, beside a St Ives quay.*

*He sought natural colours to inspire him,
combed Cornish moors, collecting yellows.*

*He harnessed the power of the familiar,
enjoying every mark, and every gesture.*

*Spontaneity gave his work authority.
He thought creatively and painted intuitively.*

*He sent circles spinning with spiral energy
and explored blacks infinite diversity.*

*Frost raised his glass to Lorca's imagery,
sharing his train to Banbury with the sun.*

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