USC James Harmon Hoose
Library of Philosophy

General Description

The Main Reading Room's impressive design features include a very high cathedral ceiling with massive crossbeams; walls covered with decorative painting and twenty-two recessed plaques depicting great philosophers. Bright, clear windows soar on either side of the room. Tall, graceful columns supporting Moorish arches parallel the windows and delineate study alcoves formed by the bookshelves below the windows, accent the length of the room and lead the eye to colorful stained glass windows in the apse. At the end opposite the apse is the great stone fireplace; and down the center of the room, unifying the whole, are five sets of refectory-style tables and chairs. In addition, the entry-way arch displays a wood carving of a scholar and students.

Impressive also is the room formerly known as the Ralph Tyler Flewelling Reading Room. Rich walnut bookshelves line three sides of the room. Arched windows on two sides reach above the bookshelves nearly to the high ceiling, and light-colored stucco walls and ceiling soften the light from the windows. Attractive hanging light fixtures, and three of the five (two remain in the Dornsife Admissions Presentation Room) tables and chairs specially designed for the room complement the design of the Main Reading Room and extend the ambience of serenity conducive to study and reflection. Several portraits that once hung in the reading room and are now located in the School of Philosophy Administrative Office: Daniel Robinson, Heinrich Gomperz, Ralph Tyler Flewelling, John Hospers, Ferdinand Canning Scott Schiller, and James Harmon Hoose.

Design Specifics

- Main Reading Room dimensions: 115 feet long by 22 feet wide by 38 feet high
- Decorative wall painting designer: Julian Ellsworth Garnsey
- Stained-glass windows creator: Judson Stained-Glass Studios, Los Angeles
- Mosaics (22): Subject matter and inscriptions were supplied by Dr. Ralph Tyler Flewelling, Director of the School of Philosophy; design of all but two was by the architect, Ralph Carlin Flewelling. The aim of the mosaics was to depict the succession of philosophical ideas from Greeks through the nineteenth century. Buddha and Confucius are included "as important in the philosophical ideas of a great portion of the human race."
- There is some evidence that the tile works were designed by Helen Bruton. According to information provided by Wendy Good, "In several interviews she [Helen Bruton] discussed being hired by Gladding McBean to finish the project after the first draftsman left the job (after completing Confucius and Buddha)." (Personal email communication from Wendy Good to Melissa Miller, March 17, 2019).

More from Wendy Good:
"I learned about Helen Bruton's involvement with the philosopher mosaics from interviews she gave in the 1960s and 70s as well as some contemporary sources. I also want to bring to your attention this video recording of an interview with Helen and Margaret Bruton from 1975. Helen (in red) talks about the project at USC in the first video, from minutes 11:00 to 14:00. Interview with Bruton Sisters
https://archive.org/details/castcdsm_000002

1 Note added by Melissa Miller, Head Faculty Librarian of the Hoose Library of Philosophy, this room is now the Dornsife Admissions Presentation Room and is no longer affiliated with USC Libraries
2 Note added by Melissa Miller, Head Faculty Librarian of the Hoose Library of Philosophy
3 Note added by Melissa Miller, Head Faculty Librarian of the Hoose Library of Philosophy

http://www.publicartinla.com/USCArt/Hoose/
I love this interview, because she talks about how Dr. Flewelling told her she could not put dogs in Emerson’s portrait. She agreed, but then she hid the dogs up in the clouds. If you look closely at the clouds floating above Emerson’s head, you can see they are in the form of running dogs! Helen Bruton was a talented artist and a fascinating person. Her involvement with Hoose Library is very exciting, and I hope we can work together to bring this interesting piece of history back to light.⁴

- **Additional historic information may be found in the following sources:**
  - "Three Artist Sisters Upset One Genius to Family Idea," *Oakland Tribune* (August 18, 1932)

Each mosaic depicts the philosopher in a background scene representative of some portion of his life with an inscription from his works. The philosophers and inscriptions are:

**South Wall Mosaics**

- **Buddha**: To the man who does me wrong I will return the protection of my most ungrudging love.
- **Confucius**: He who knoweth the truth is not as good as he who loveth it: and he who loveth it is not as good as he who delighteth in it.
- **Thales**: It is difficult to know thyself, it is easy to advise others.
- **Heraclitus**: For the most part the things divine escape us because of our unbelief.
- **Anaxagoras**: Mind is infinite and self-ruled.
- **Democritus**: The fatherland of the wise and the good is the whole world.
- **Protagoras**: Man is the measure of the universe.
- **Socrates**: No evil can befall a good man either here or hereafter.
- **Plato**: The first and best victory is to conquer self.
- **Aristotle**: Dear is Plato, dearer still is truth.
- **Epicurus**: If you live according to nature you will never be poor.
- **Augustine**: Thou hast made us for thyself and our hearts are restless till they rest in thee.

**North Wall Mosaics**

- **Albertus Magnus**: The creation in time is a revelation of the eternal acting of God.
- **Descartes**: Cogito ergo sum [I think therefore I am]
- **Spinoza**: To perfect the understanding is nothing else but to understand God.
- **Leibniz**: It is God who is the final reason of things.
- **Newton**: I have been like a boy playing on the seashore whilst the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me.
- **Locke**: Thinking is the action and not the essence of the soul.
- **Berkeley**: Westward the course of empire takes its way, time's noblest offspring is the last.
- **Kant**: Mind is supreme and the universe is but the reflected thought of God.
- **Hegel**: A nation which has no metaphysics is like a temple possessing no holy of holies.
- **Emerson**: Great men are they who see that spiritual is stronger than any material force.

⁴ Note added by Melissa Miller, Head Faculty Librarian of the Hoose Library of Philosophy