

Did Kevin Sinnott become a renowned artist overnight?

Word Count - 1487

Kevin Sinnott is considered to be one of the most renowned contemporary Welsh artists. His work focuses on using bright bold brush strokes, and usually contains an obvious narrative using semiotics. In this essay I will be discussing whether Sinnotts achievements can be attributed to his work being purchased by Amgueddfa Cymru, or if his success was brought on by other instances in his career. The goal of this essay will be to shed light on Sinnotts journey as an artist, and drive forward some of his other achievements over just running away with the hairdresser.



Figure 1: Running away with the hairdresser (Sinnott, K. 1995)

As can be seen in figure 1 (Sinnott, K. 1995), *Running away with the hairdresser* depicts a man and a woman running through a village in the town of a welsh valley. The painting consists of bold brush strokes, and is accented with warm lighting. It communicates the willingness to escape everyday life and the intrusive feeling to get up and run away. A description of the

painting on the Amgueddfa Cymru website, *Running away with the hairdresser* is said to depict 'leaving one's past behind' (*Collections Online*, 2023).

This can be supported by an interview with Sinnott (2023), who describes the painting as depicting the ability to 'always leave something', he also suggests that the painting depicts a 'fling'. This interpretation of the painting may attribute to its popularity, In the book *ways of seeing*, John Berger talks about people having an ingrained interpretation of art 'when an image is presented as a work of art, the way people look at it is affected by a whole series of learnt assumptions about art' 'Beauty, Truth, Genius...' (Berger 2008, p. 11). These preconceived notions people are supposed to have may contribute to the popularity *Running away with the hairdresser* has, due to a person's natural instinct to idolise an idea or feeling, in this case, the feeling of a scandalous escape.

During the interview, Sinnott (2023) also discusses his use of a 'stereotypical background [which could be] anywhere in the [Welsh] Valleys.' This is another aspect of this painting which could again have obtained its popularity, 'when we see a landscape, we situate ourselves in it.' (Berger 2008, p. 11). This could also indicate why the painting is so popular in Wales, as it could provide a sense of belonging or nostalgia particularly for Welsh consumers of the work.



Figure 2: Cymraeg (Sinnott, K. n.d.)

As can be seen in figure 2 (Sinnott, K. n.d.) *Cymraeg* depicts a woman in the foreground, dressed in traditional Welsh clothing walking along a path towards parliament. She is accompanied by a backdrop consisting of figures waving the flags of Scotland, England and Great Britain. The painting is bright with large bold brush strokes, synonymous with Sinnotts other paintings. In an interview with Sinnott (2023), he states that the woman in the painting is a semiotic to 'Plaid Cymru', whilst the 'three flags represent the political presence of England and Scotland in parliament.' This is to portray how 'our tradition is seen to be outdated to parliament, as well as our language, which makes it inaccessible to us', hence the title *Cymraeg*. This painting is a political piece, 'Their purpose [a painting] was not to transport their spectator-owners into new experience, but to embellish an experience they already possess' (Berger 2008, p. 101). What this painting presents is the idea that regardless of the circumstances, there is always a movement to your culture, nationality, community and it affects factors of your everyday life. Everyday you wake up, so does your culture. Your language only speaks when you do. Again this contributes to the idea that Sinnotts paintings are successful in Wales due to their strong themes of Welsh culture and in this specific case, politics.

There is a suggestion that Sinnott gained his popularity overnight due to his work *Running away with the hairdresser* being bought by Amgueddfa Cymru. In an interview with Andrew Renton, Head of Design Collections and Keeper of Art at Amgueddfa Cymru, Renton (2023) tells us that 'there was an effort to collect welsh art in the 90s, David Olson [Art Collector for Amgueddfa Cymru] had a list of artists he seeked work from, and Kevin [Sinnott] was on that list.' This tells us that Sinnotts status as a Welsh artist contributed to his recognition from Amgueddfa cymru, in addition to his use of Welsh themes within his work.

The notion that Sinnotts work gained popularity overnight can be supported by Renton (2023) 'When we bought the work in 1996, we purchased it for just over eight thousand pounds, it is

now worth an estimate of forty thousand pounds' 'Sinnotts other work did noticeably gain value when the museum started displaying his work'.

Sinnott (2023) states that he was not present when his art dealer sold his artworks to Olson, as he had just moved back to Wales due to 'the crash within the art world'. 'I got a call from my dealer in London that *Running away with the hairdresser* had been essentially "claimed" by somebody from the National Museum [of Wales], that painting was not even on display in the show.' This can tell us that Sinnotts work wasn't just seen and picked up on a whim, but was sought after by Amgueddfa Cymru.

Sinnott (2023) 'I do get fed up hearing about that painting all the time' 'I dislike my life', I believe it to be unfair to credit Sinnotts success to just *Running away with the hairdresser*. In Sinnotts book *Behind The Canvas* Sinnott purposefully does not include the painting, as a stance against its popularity.

Sinnott seems to be unaware of how he gained popularity himself, in an email response, Sinnott (2023) stated 'My popularity is a bit of a mystery to me because as far as I'm aware I have had little serious written reviews of my work. And I do very little of my own promotion.'

He suggests that it could be due to his return to living in his home country of Wales, 'Perhaps there are some clues in my movement back to Wales to live and work after I had made an uneven success of a career in London and American galleries and how little of this was known in Wales.' This gives us the notion that we can again refer back to Sinnott using strong Welsh themes within his work, which could be one of the basis behind his popularity particularly in Wales; Welsh people have a desire to uplift Welsh creators. 'A very Artistically important though stressful move.' (Sinnott 2023) A move back inspired Sinnott to create a larger quantity of work, 'The paintings quickly started to flow' (Sinnott 2023). Maybe this quantity, and we can assume due to his comfort within his practice due to being back in Wales contributing to an increase in quality as well, are to accredit for his popularity. 'A lot of these early Welsh works went straight

up the M4 back to London for exhibition with my dealer there [Flowers Gallery]'. (Sinnott 2023)

This is where *Running away with the hairdresser* was purchased. From this we can suggest that *Running away with the hairdresser* was highly likely to be a large factor in Sinnotts success, however, it was obtained through hard work by Sinnott, and was less of a lucky break as could be initially suggested, and more so an earned artistic achievement.

'Those years saw some Welsh TV [make content] on me. But it was, I hope, always the character of the paintings themselves that drove me along an independent path. Other outlets such as the Martin Tinney gallery in Cardiff, and exports to Germany, helped spread the word.' These other achievements of Sinnotts also contribute to his success as an artist, recognition on both local and national television channels certainly helped him gain an audience for his work, and to call back to earlier in this essay, his technique and themes would have been recognised and are likely the reason Sinnotts paintings gained so much traction.

I believe Sinnotts seemingly rapid overnight gain in popularity stems from a build up of hard work and crucial decisions from Sinnott in regards to his art career, which gained him the notice from large galleries such as Amgueddfa Cymru to buy and show his works. I believe that Sinnott did not suddenly gain notice overnight, but slowly built up his name as an artist through the aforementioned means. His usage of semiotics in his work are a sure sign of his popularity with the public, his paintings giving them something to relate to. His themes of Welsh culture are also to credit for his popularity within Wales, as they give Welsh people something to relate to specific to their culture.

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