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Art In the Wild

The title of my exhibition is ‘Art In The Wild’, featuring four artists who are inspired by and use nature in their art works, including William Morris, Andy Goldsworthy, Edward Burtynsky and James Turrell. Nature is very important to me as I spend a lot of my time immersed in nature, walking, hiking, and camping. I am very aware of the fragility of nature and how important it is to preserve these areas for the future. Naturalist Sir David Attenborough states on preserving our planet, “Cherish the natural world, because you’re a part of it and you depend on it”(Earth.Org, 2021).

The exhibition space is a forest trail in North Wales. The trail starts at the Cornel Centre and visitors are guided from one artwork to another, whilst passing through the forest. My intention is for visitors to be surrounded by the sights, sounds, and smells of nature rather than looking at images in a gallery space. The future of curating seems to be becoming more digital with technological advances, whereas my intention is to create an experience. Curating is according to Hans Ulrich Obrist, “attempted pollination of culture, or a form of map-making that opens new routes through a city, a people or a world”. (Obrist, 2014, P1). The visitors to my exhibition will be following an actual map or creating their own route through the forest.

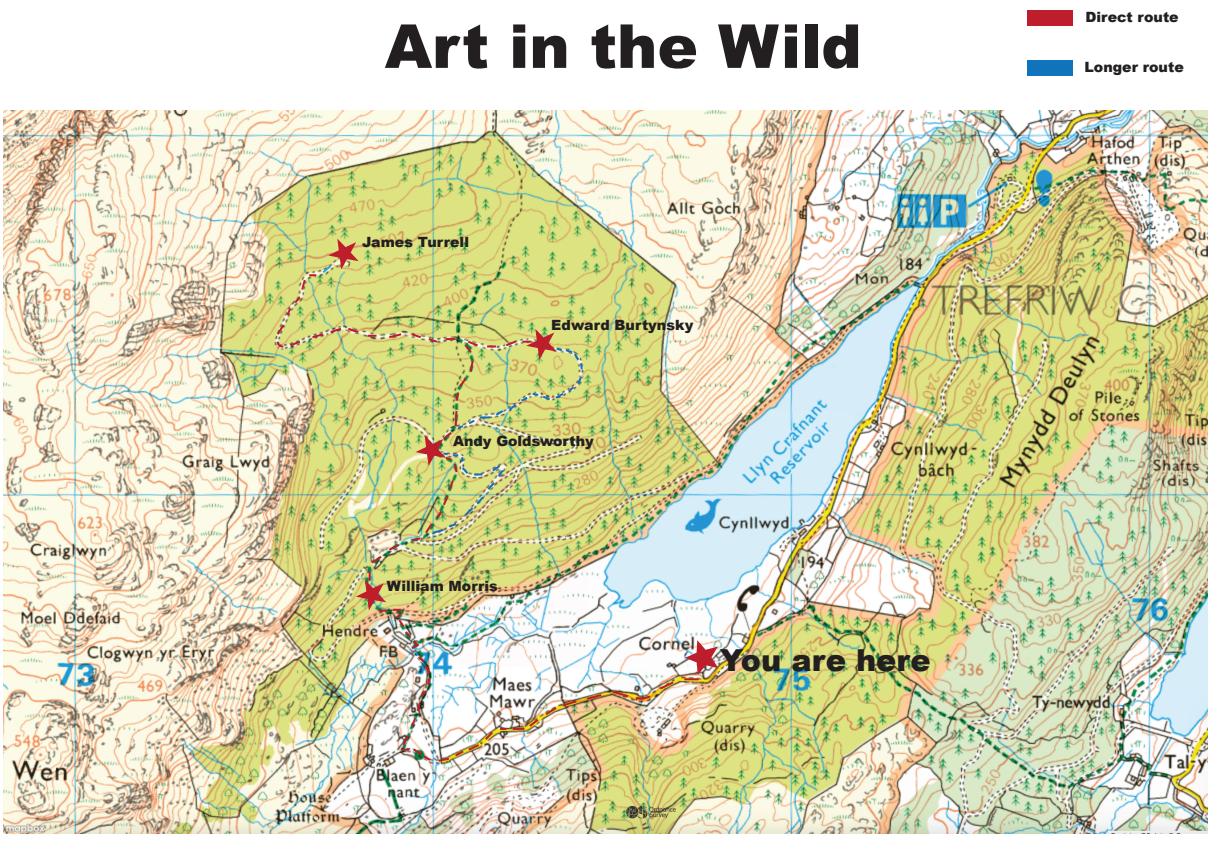


Fig 1. Watkins (2024) Exhibition Map

The Cornel Centre is a short drive from Betws-y-Coed in North Wales. This is a place I have visited in the past year and is very beautiful. The many trails through the woods have made this area more accessible whilst still having a demanding element.

The first artist on the trail is William Morris, the founding father of the Arts and Crafts Movement. The trail then moves on to the work of Andy Goldsworthy in a clearing where the 'Wood Line' can be seen and interacted with. Next is the work of Edward Burtynsky, placed just off the track, encouraging the visitor to explore further. Finally at the end of a trail you come to the work of James Turrell placed on an incline, which allows the visitor to rest and reflect on the trail and the art works they have seen, before descending back through the forest to the Cornel Centre. This gives people a chance to look at the work again from a different angle as well as seeing the arts works twice, as just sitting with something once is not always enough. The Cornel Centre has a kitchen with hot and cold drinks served when visitors finish. This space gives people time to connect and discuss with others who have the same passion and feelings for nature and art.

William Morris ' The Strawberry Thief'



Fig 2. William Morris (1883) Strawberry Thief.

Nature was a constant source of inspiration for William Morris. Morris was the driving force behind the Arts and Crafts Movement (1880 -1920). He turned his back on the new wave of industrialisation and mechanisation. Morris recognised the importance of mass production

but was committed to the principals of traditional craftsmanship, according to (The Art Story, 2017). He had a strong social responsibility to make his work available to all "… I do not want art for a few; any more than education for a few; or freedom for a few…" (www.npg.org.uk, n.d.) Theorist John Ruskin was also against the changes in society that came with industrialisation. "he saw nature as supreme divine idea and there for a key to meaningful art" (Osborne,2010 p73). The Strawberry Thief (1883) is Morris's most famous design and continues to be popular today (see Fig 1). Morris observed the thrushes stealing fruit from his kitchen garden at Kelmscott Manor in Oxfordshire. The design consists of bright, vibrant colours, the red strawberries and the green foliage against the blue background. The daring thrush evokes feelings of mischief and nostalgia for the beauty of being surrounded by nature. The design was made using and ancient Asian technique called indigo discharge method, this gave Morris the level of detail that he desired.

Andy Goldsworthy 'Wood Line'



Fig 3. Andy Goldsworthy (2010-2011) Wood Line

Andy Goldsworthy is known for his site-specific sculptures and land art placed within nature. He is also a photographer and environmentalist. Wood Line (2010-2011) was created in Presidio, San Francisco National Park, a historic federal forest. It is 365 meters long reflecting the numbers of days in a year and was created over two summers. Goldsworthy stated that Wood Line,

> "…draws the place. Filling an empty space between planted rows of a historic forest, Wood Line represents the quiet meandering of the forest and serves as a literal layer adding to the historic site. The artwork is not made to improve the place, but to be engaged and to work with it" (National Park Service, n.d.).

The line of felled trees closes the gap between the empty rows of planted eucalyptus and the surrounding woodlands. This works invites the public of all ages to walk and play on the trees and listen with intent to the sounds created when traveling along them. As someone who has a strong connection to nature, Goldsworthy was very careful when moving the trees to not disrupt the mini ecosystems around them.

Edward Burtynsky 'Water'

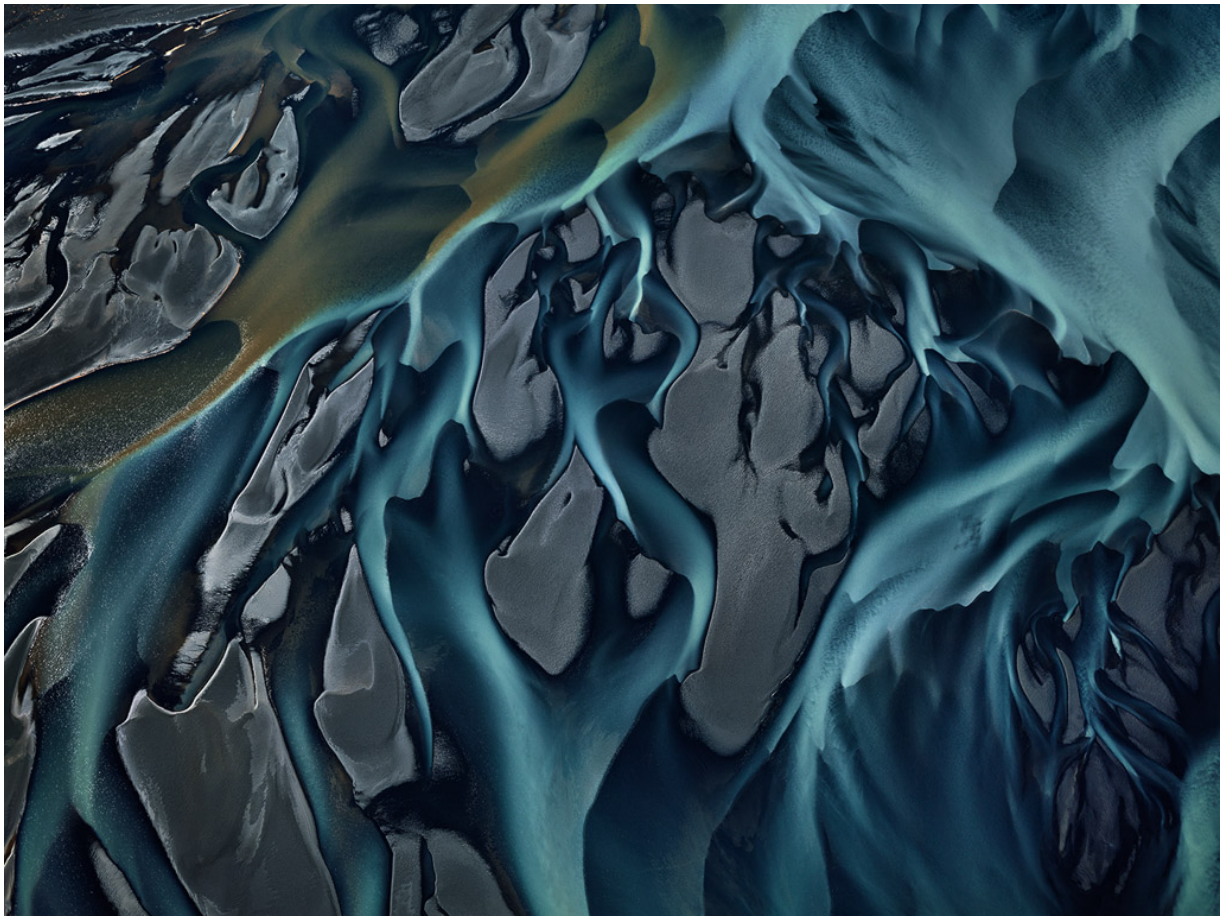


Fig 4. Edward Burtynsky (2012) Thjorsá River #1 from the series Water, Iceland



Fig 5. Edward Burtynsky (2013) Salinas #3 from the series Water, Cádiz, Spain



Fig 6. Edward Burtynsky (2011) Colorado River Delta #2 from the series Water, Near San Felipe, Baja, Mexico.

The three images selected are from a larger series of work by Edward Burtynsky, he stated,

“My hope is that these pictures will stimulate a process of thinking about something essential to our survival; something we often take for granted—until it’s gone.” – Edward Burtynsky (Burtynsky, n.d.). Echoing Sir David Attenborough’s message to the world. It highlights the very real threat to our beautiful planet. Burtynsky is known for his sublime, large format photographs depicting the impact of industrialisation on nature and human life. This series of images shows us how powerful, but also beautiful water can be and the many forms it comes in. Water will go wherever it wants to go and when photographed from above can take on different forms. Writer Robert Macfarlane in his book ‘The Wild Place’ (2007, p.115) described how the landscape also surprised him, he stated,

> “Each landscape had taken me by surprise, had behaved in ways I had not foreseen or sometimes even wanted. But I had also learned from each place, had been brought to think by each in unexpected accents and shapes. Connections and patterns were emerging, too, supplied by the land itself”.

Burtynsky’s work neither celebrates nor condemns what is happening to nature at the hands of man. Instead, he creates aesthetic images that makes the viewer question what they are looking at.

James Turrell ‘Meeting’

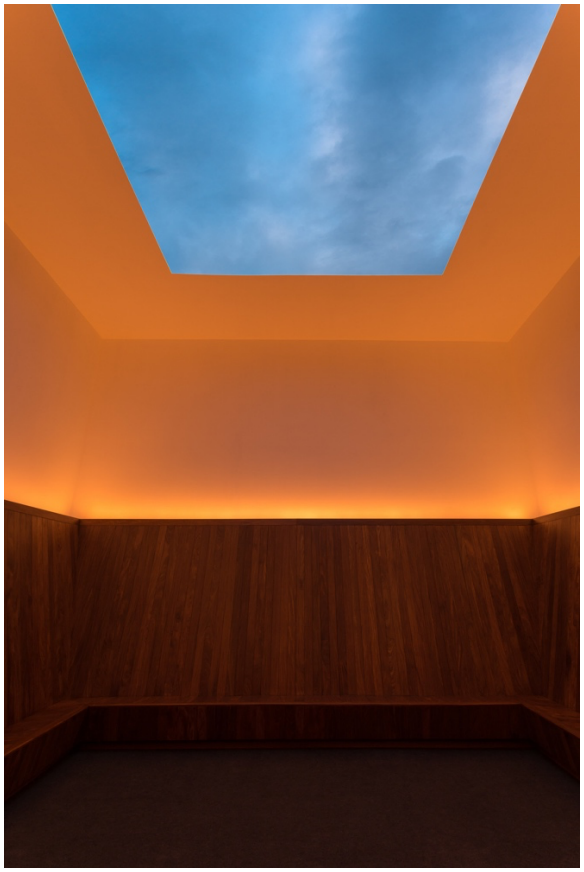


Fig 5. James Turrell (1980/86/2016) Meeting

In complete contrast to William Morris but following on with the theme of nature, James Turrell installation has created a vision of the sky that encourages the viewer to look up and contemplate the constant changing face of nature. Turrell was brought up as a Quaker and the influence of Quaker meeting houses can be seen in the simple wooden benches surrounding the space. “The benches therefore suggest not just the shared nature of the experience of seeing the sky, but also the possibility of transcendence in the act of looking upwards” (Shultz, 2016). LED lights are used to illuminate the room, controlled by a computer, and designed to change and contrast with the ever-changing sky. Turrell stated that ‘Meeting’ explored his interest in how humans “make colour with our own eyes” (Shultz, 2016). The space has a very minimal interior which draws the viewers’ attention to the sky that has been framed by the celling. Robert Macfarlane, when describing being immersed in a forest on a sunny day, stated that it was similar to a “light box that showed all its colours once you stepped inside”. (Macfarlane, 2007,p319). Turrell has recreated a similar experience of the wonders of nature in a gallery space.

As a result of the research conducted for this exhibition, it has reaffirmed my love of nature and my interest in the many forms of depicting nature. From William Morris's decorative prints inspired by the natural world outside his window, to Andy Goldsworthy's use of trees and branches found in the landscape. Including Edward Burtynsky's observations of man's effect on nature and his aesthetically pleasing images. Finally, James Turrell lets you feel and be immersed in nature at the same time with his transforming, colour changing installations. My hope is that visitors will be surrounded by nature and encouraged to play and explore whilst observing the selected art works, and come away on a high from a release of endorphins from seeing art in the wild.

Figures

Fig 1. Watkins (2024) Exhibition Map [Digital Generated Image]

Fig 2.
William Morris (1883) Strawberry Thief Available at:
https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O78889/strawberry-thief-furnishing-fabric-morris-william/ (Accessed 17 April 2024).

Fig 3.
Andy Goldsworthy (2010-2011) Wood Line Available at:
https://www.nps.gov/places/000/wood-line-by-andy-goldsworthy.htm(Accessed 17 April 2024).

Fig 4.
Edward Burtynsky (2012) Thjorsá River #1 from the series Water, Iceland. Available at:
https://www.edwardburtynsky.com/projects/photographs/water (Accessed 17 April 2024).

Fig 5.
Edward Burtynsky 2013) Salinas #3 from the series Water, Cádiz, Spain. Available at:
https://www.edwardburtynsky.com/projects/photographs/water (Accessed 24 April 2024)

Fig 6.
Edward Burtynsky (2011) Colorado River Delta #2 from the series Water,
Near San Felipe, Baja, Mexico.
https://www.edwardburtynsky.com/projects/photographs/water (Accessed 24 April 2024)

Fig 7.
James Turrell (1980/86/2016) Meeting Available at:
https://www.moma.org/audio/playlist/288/3732 (Accessed 24 April 2024).

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www.nps.gov. (n.d.) *Wood Line by Andy Goldsworthy (U.S. National Park Service)*. [online] Available at: https://www.nps.gov/places/000/wood-line-by-andy-goldsworthy.htm.