

Report: Site-Specific Exhibition

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Site Specific Exhibition Title: The Glory of Glowing Glass

Rationale

- Clearly articulate why the chosen site is meaningful. What historical, cultural, or social importance does it hold? How do these attributes align with the conceptual framework of your work?
- Conceptual/Contextual Ideas: Discuss your group and individual interpretations of the broader themes your exhibition explores, such as identity, memory, community etc.

St. James Church, located in Uplands, Swansea, is a gothic Anglican church and Grade II listed building. Built in 1867 in memory of Rev. Edward B. Squire, a former Vicar of Swansea, the church holds over a century of historical significance. The building was initially built to serve as a chapel of ease for St Marys church and did not become its own pariah until 1985. During World War II, the church suffered significant war damage, which resulted in the loss of its pre-war stained glass. As a 'Church Of Sanctuary', St James is a safe space for internationals and refugees. The church has a dedicated and supportive congregation, with many of those interested in art or artists themselves.

Our exhibition, titled "*The Glory of Glowing Glass*," drew inspiration from various attributes of the church, from its peaceful atmosphere and welcoming community, to its traditional, gothic aesthetic and natural light, to explore the themes of memory, spirituality, and human connection. Further interactions with the congregation during and after Sunday services, and conversations with the Vicar provided a deeper understanding of how truly community-driven St James is.

As outsiders to the faith, we wanted to represent our own experience with the unfamiliar, in an experimental yet respectful manner. I was conscious about taking over the space in a way that was exclusionary to the congregation, therefore in my individual response I decided to invite the exhibition visitors (many of whom were from the parish) to partake in the creation of my piece.

We each approached the creation of our work from different perspectives with the underlying theme being light. Ollie covered a section of pews with black cloth and experimented with light and shadow, as representation of life and death. Hannah placed black and white, blurred images on the backs of the pews inspired by her complex, personal relationship with St James. Natasha took on a more community related approach, by using the writings of the parish, overlaid with images from overlooked areas of the church. For my own piece, I created cyanotypes featuring architecture, symbols and textures found both in and outside of the church. Through a 3 step process of bleaching, rinsing and red wine toning, the cyanotypes were transformed by the exhibition visitors- By engaging directly with the materials and the space, participants were encouraged to contemplate themes of sacrifice, renewal, and the sanctity of shared experience.

A Summary of the Research

- Provide a concise overview of the research you have conducted over the past semester that has led you to the production of your site-specific intervention.
- Demonstrate your understanding of primary and secondary research skills taught over the past 18 months in developing your ideas from concepts to final installation. (Site visits/ practical experimentation, data collecting etc.)

Visiting Swansea archive - having access to informative and historical images, documents, news paper articles and data. The images and detailed Information provided by the archive staff proved to be very beneficial in the development of my project. I was visually inspired by early 1900s postcards, stained glass design logs and even found the title of the exhibition through a relevant newspaper article.

Visiting the site - I spent a significant amount of time at St James over the course of the site specific module. I attended 4 Sunday Services during this time, with each covering a variety of different topics through the lens of Christianity- ranging from mental health, loss and grief, the difficulty of faith, world conflict and sacred rituals/ celebrations (Holy Communion, Baptism, Feast of All Saints). I would often take photos and audio recordings during these services to use within my project and the exhibition. After every Sunday service, majority of the congregation moved to the church hall for tea and biscuits. I used that time to speak more personally with members of the parish, there are 3 that stand specifically:

1. A woman of around 40 y/o who was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis. This woman was being safeguarded by the church so could not be photographed. We discussed how her health diagnosis strengthened her faith and allowed her to be surrounded by community.
2. Eifion, an elderly man who had been part of the parish for many years. We bonded over our mutual practise and love of photography - Eifion would often chat with me about the darkroom he used to have at home.
3. Vivian, an older woman who recently joined St James from another parish. Vivian attended UWTSD in her youth and specialised in stained glass. Her artistic talent was visible in multiple areas of the church- being a proficient calligrapher, Vivian was responsible for updating the St James 'Book of Remembrance'.

I also attended the church building during the week to take photos for the project and tested out different materials and ideas, this included : shooting through acetate, using the church light to create cyanotypes, putting material over the pews and figuring out where / how to display my final work within the space. This also included group idea placements.

Individual site specific report and artist research - finding and analysing artists in relation to site specific art was beneficial to my understanding of how site dictates the nature of art made. This assisted in the development of my ideas.

Techniques Developed for the Production of Your Body of Work

- Outline the tools, materials, or methods employed in creating your work. Highlight innovations or adaptations that you have considered to align with notions of 'site specificity'.
- Practical Application: Describe how these techniques contributed to the final exhibition and supported its conceptual aims.

During the course of this project, I engaged in an extensive range of materials, methods, and tools. This was to ensure a refined final outcome. This included:

Photographs: Took images of the church architecture, religious symbols and materials/ textures using both digital and film cameras. These images were used to create cyanotype prints. I also used different colours of acetate to shoot through, in relation to the colours found in the stained glass windows.

Cyanotypes: Experimenting with various toning liquids, including tea and wine, to achieve unique effects. I initially planned on toning with just red wine, due to slightly lacklustre results I added green tea to the wine to ensure a more purple toning colour was achieved. This decision was based on research conducted throughout the project.

Tests were also conducted with different bleach strengths, exposure times to UV light, and durations in the toning bath to add a variety of tonal shades to the final prints. The cyanotypes were created both within the church's space and outdoors. I completed extensive at home production of cyanotypes using a UV lamp due to overcast weather conditions.

Paper Stocks and Sizes: Tested a variety of paper types with different colours and GSM weights to assess how they responded to the cyanotype process to achieve the final aesthetic. Final outcome was produced on 500 GSM cotton rag in sizes A5 and A6 in relation to the size of bibles, prayer cards and archival postcards. The cotton rag gave a more aged/ artefact effect to the prints - I wanted the prints to feel like they belonged in such an old space.

Light-Catching Tests: Tested out capturing the light patterns and shadows to tie my project to the site in a more abstract way. These tests proved to be somewhat of a failure. When rinsing the prints I was left with blank paper as a result of under exposure to UV light.

Zine and Card Design: Initially testing zines as a medium for group idea. Used Indesign and Photoshop to create front cover designs and alternate layouts .

Due to time constraints, I transitioned to using A5 cards with a map on the back. This decision was driven by practicality and communicative strength, creating a more accessible format that also took over the held its own place within the exhibition.

Audio Recording: Captured ambient sound and recorded audio of singing and prayer during Sunday service. The idea behind this was to juxtapose the silence and peace we experienced being that the church alone with the noise of the Sunday service - aiming to create a haunting echo of voices.

Individual and Group work overview

- Provide a summary of your contribution to production of a final site-specific exhibition.
- What role did you take in the group?
- What have you found challenging throughout the process?
- How have you overcome any hardship that you have dealt with both in the making of your work, and working with others.
- What team and personal skills have you learned/practiced that might be useful in your professional development for future career opportunities?

I believe I took on a leadership role within this project. I wanted to ensure a comfortable and efficient working environment for my group, to ensure work was being created at a high standard with minimal stress. This led to me taking on more responsibility and heavily contributing concept and design ideas for the project, including group collaboration pieces. I was responsible for the following:

- Initial group site was unavailable (I initially contacted them via phone call to gain confirmation to use the space). This created some panic within the group so I set up a meeting with Ryan to get advice on what to do. We were tasked with finding a new site location. I undertook researching multiple new sites using a map of listed buildings within Swansea. I contacted several of these places via email and phone call.

- Finding the new site specific location (St James) - Contacted St James through phone call to enquire about hosting an exhibition. During this initial contact I was able to set up a meeting at the site for the next week, to discuss our plans in person. Aiming to provide more in depth answers and hopefully confirm the site.
- At the meeting, I made sure to ask the group if they were happy and comfortable with the space, on the basis of LGBT identification and religious issues/belief - as Churches are known to be unwelcoming, even condemning/violent towards these things. Everyone said they were comfortable with the space, so it was confirmed.
- I was told the rest of the group had not reached out to the other places discussed - this was due to anxiety over calling and emailing people. I decided to take on the role of communication and organisation to ease the stress of the group. - I was therefore responsible for contacting the Swansea archive to organise visits, communicating with Ian (St James Vicar) to organise when we had access to the church during the week to sure enough time in the site and contacting printing places.
- Creating the Zine and Exhibition handouts - I came up with the idea of creating a collaborative zine based on the textures and materials found within the church- This was initially going to be a solo project however I wanted to ensure everyone had photographic images to display within the exhibition space. Along with my own images, the members of my group provided 5- 10 images each which I then collated and edited. I tested out various cover designs and alternate layouts for the zine. Due to time constraints and issues with printing, I came up with the idea of changing the concept of the zine into individual A5 card print-outs instead (with a map on the back). I then designed, edited and paid to get these cards printed.
- Sent marketing and exhibition information to Ian so he could help promote on local Facebook groups and church newsletter.
- I was responsible for recording the audio from the church service that was used in the exhibition. I planned to edit this audio however I did not have time, therefore Ollie took on that task.
- Collated, edited and printed everyones artist statement - mounted them onto foam board.
- Created a sign for outside of the church to draw in more visitors on opening day.
- Set up my own space on exhibition opening and assisted others. - Managed time effectively.

Challenges and How I Overcame Them

- **Technical:** Refining handout materials and testing materials for my own work in the church space, required persistent experimentation. I overcame these difficulties through further testing and by seeking input/ opinion from my group.
- **Group Dynamics:** Adapting to collaborative work required me to develop patience and trust in my group. I aimed to maintain open communication and focus on the shared vision of the exhibition. I was able to overcome moments of frustration and ensure that our show remained collaborative and productive.
- **Balancing Roles:** Contributing many ideas made it tempting to take on more responsibilities in an unpractical way. I learned to reel myself in and delegate/offer tasks to others, which I think ultimately strengthened the group dynamic and allowed everyone for to feel involved.

Technical and Transferable skills (professional development)

Balancing individual work with group responsibilities was often difficult and required me to adapt. Unexpected changes, delays in testing and shifts in group priorities, taught me to remain flexible and focus on solutions rather than setbacks or my personal emotions. This experience helped me develop stronger organisational skills and the importance of focusing on the right priorities.

Working within a group taught me how to balance personal and collective goals, as well as the value of compromise. Recognising and addressing my discomfort with group work similarities and shared tasks has made me more open to collaboration in the future (Collaborate don't compete). Sharing ideas constructively and navigating differing opinions within the group helped me develop better interpersonal skills. These skills have prepared me for future collaborative and project- roles where communication, adaptability, and creative problem-solving are key.

Evaluation of the Exhibition

- Execution: Assess the success of the exhibition in addressing the site's history, community, or spatial dynamics.
- Audience Interaction: Discuss how the audience engaged with your work and the site.
- Reflection: Identify areas for improvement and potential future directions for your practice.

I believe that our exhibition was very much a success and effectively responded to the site's history, community, and our own spiritual interpretations. My series, "*Altar*," directly engaged visitors in the ritualistic process and completion of the work, while connecting to the space symbolically. Our personal connections and time shared in the space was the result of great effort and overall success. The visitors interacted with the work and space in generally positive way, and would often engage in conversations about our inspirations and references.

I have also returned the prints made to the church and friends/ family, to ensure the project completed it's cycle and intention.

What would I change and improve?

- Potentially not involving the audience as much - solo toning prints, setting timers for when to tone - timers inspired by verses from the bible that resonate with me i.e Mark 5:34 : "*He said to her, 'Daughter, your faith has healed you'" - The verse codes would dictate the minutes between toning.*
- Though I enjoyed connecting with the community, it was sometimes difficult to get them to engage with my work - especially the way I had intended- people would not bother to come up to the table or not want to partake in the toning process despite obvious intrigue and conversation about the work. This was not a huge problem however, I was able to engage with most people and some that didn't partake were interested in my cyanotype prints which I would give to them / let them take (pre toning).
- Would've experimented with more imagery and designs - However I believe the repetition of certain images links with the themes and ideas I have examined throughout this project e.g ritual, restriction, freedom of choice.
- Encourage group member in-charge of marketing to post more to up engagement - shared instagram access could have solved this.
- Encouraged other members of group to do/ contribute more - Though I am happy with the exhibition outcome after taking on a more leadership role (content, idea and communication wise) , the pressure of taking on more tasks and responsibility definitely impacted my written work and other modules.

Overall, I believe this module has been very beneficial in improving my communication and transferable skills. It has also made me more confident in my ideas and work ethic, which I feel prepares me to take on future leadership roles. I look forward to future opportunities for collaboration to gain new perspectives and continue developing my practice.