

# O'r Galon: From the Heart of Wales

Mission Gallery, Swansea

## Introduction

'O'r Galon' is an exhibition about celebrating Welsh identity. This is an underrepresented area within British culture (Howell, 2015). The purpose of the exhibition is to educate people and bring communities together.

Traditionally Welsh identity has been seen as having Welsh heritage and being 'born and bred' in Wales. However, modern Welsh identity has many different aspects. This exhibition is focused on Welsh identity from a modern perspective, re-imagining what it means to be Welsh.

The artists chosen for the exhibition will be connected to this theme by having their own Welsh identity which is represented in their art. The pieces will be carefully curated, using a range of curatorial theories to show the diversity of what it means to live in Wales.

The artists I have chosen to showcase at my exhibition include Josef Herman, Meinir Mathias, Clémentine Schneidermann, Daniel Trivedy and Natalia Dias.

## Context

The exhibition will be held at the Mission Gallery in Swansea, a space large enough to hold the exhibition yet small enough for a more intimate experience. The location is in the heart of Wales' second city and is near the Dylan Thomas statue. Other visitor attractions include the Waterfront Museum, Swansea Museum, and the Marina making it part of a bigger day out. A survey by McAllister (2018) found that Mission Gallery reached 31,000 annual visitors in 2017, making it a popular destination for locals and tourists. Being a metropolitan city with two universities, Swansea is home to many people who are not from Wales. In the last census 25% of Swansea residents were not born in Wales, but this does not include students ('Swansea Council', 2021). As such, having this exhibition in Swansea can show people the diversity of Welsh identity. Additionally, the gift shop at the Mission Gallery sells items that support Welsh artists, making Mission Gallery a perfect venue (*Mission Shop*, 2024).

This exhibition will have various artworks hung along the walls in the main square space, continuing on to the round room where there will be an installation. To enhance the experience of Welsh identity, as well as artworks, there will also be traditional and contemporary Welsh dress displayed on the walls to embrace the traditional and modern aspects of Wales.

Traditional Welsh dress is derived from clothing worn by Welsh countrywomen during the late eighteenth to early nineteenth century. Women during this period were described as wearing tall

‘men’s hats’ accompanied by a kerchief, flannel petticoats, aprons and paisley shawls (Stevens, 2002, p.65). Traditional Welsh dress looked different for women of different status. Women from rural mountain areas wore heavy woolen clothing, whereas opulent townswomen wore more favourable, lighter coloured cotton and linen clothing with wider petticoats. This proves that both tradition and modern influence co-existed during this period, much like Wales today (Stevens, 2002 pp. 65-70).

Traditional Welsh dress is no longer worn except by children during Saint David’s Day celebrations. Contemporary Welsh dress is usually sports shirts, particularly Welsh rugby shirts. Welsh university hoodies also show how different people make up Welsh identities, from local students to national and international students and graduates. These items will be placed on the walls to show this modern way of expressing how people are part of Wales regardless of their birthplace.

According to George (2015, pp.108-109) studies show how light can alter our perception of colour in artwork. He also notes how subtle changes in light temperature can disrupt the flow of an exhibition. To avoid this, I aim to maintain consistent lighting throughout the space. Additionally, studies show that colour and layout can alter our perception of an exhibition (George, 2015, pp. 78, pp. 105 - 106). The term ‘white cube’ was introduced in the early twentieth century to describe a gallery distinguished by its square shape, white walls and overhead lighting which fits the mission galleries primary square room. Research suggests that this style of gallery space minimizes distraction (Tate, 2022). The white walls offer a frame for artwork, akin to the borders of a photograph, which I believe will correspond well with the work I’m exhibiting.

Due to the exhibition focusing on Welsh identity more than Welsh history, there won't be a chronological order to the artwork, it is up to the viewer to decide the flow of the exhibition. All information about this exhibition and the individual artworks will be written in both Welsh and English. Information will be given in a leaflet, so the audience does not have to crowd into one area to read the information. Findings confirm that pamphlets are an effective way of promoting smaller exhibitions (George, 2015, pp. 60-61). Visitors may also take the leaflet home and read it in their own time or keep it as a souvenir.

## **Artists and Artworks – Josef Herman**



*Fig. 1*



*Fig. 2*

Polish born Josef Herman came to Wales in 1944 after being separated from his family during the Holocaust. He was warmly accepted by the Welsh community of Ystradgynlais and given the nickname, 'Joe Bach' (Carradice, 2012). Herman used his skills as a painter to depict and immortalise the bleak work and social conditions faced by the Welsh community during this time. He embodied the spirit of the community and gave them a voice outside the constructs of village life.

These paintings were both made in the 1950's following his previous focus on town and village scenes. He began to focus on miners from the late 1940s, with whom he claimed to have a strong affinity (Gray, 2018). Knowing that Herman was not originally from Wales, we not only see the paintings as an outside view of Welsh culture but also through his own personal experiences.

### **Meinir Mathias**



*Fig. 3*

Meinir Mathias is a renowned contemporary artist from Wales. Her work reflects “the complex tapestry of Welsh identity”, (The Western Mail, 2021 cited in Meinir Mathias, 2023), connecting historical Welsh culture with heroism and personal experiences.

Political protest is an important message within Mathias’ work which we see in ‘Cerrigion Coch’, 2020. The painting depicts a young man wearing a traditional Welsh hat and apron accompanied with a pair of modern trainers, seemingly guarding a red wall behind him. The wall represents the ‘Cofiwch Dryweryn’ walls made by the people of Wales to remember the flooding of the Welsh town of Dryweryn in 1965, to supply water to England (*The stories behind drowned village Capel Celyn*, 2023). Mathias’ work is a reminder of the plight of protecting Wales through history, and a modern perspective that is relevant to this day.

“Our language won’t be denied. Our culture, our symbolism and mythology won’t be denied. Our history won’t be erased from the classroom any longer” (Price, 2024).

## Daniel Trivedy



*Fig. 4*

Daniel Trivedy is a multi-disciplinary Welsh artist of Indian descent. His installation piece, *Welsh Emergency Blanket 2019*, embraces migration and sanctuary in Wales, using the symbolism of the traditional Welsh blanket. Daniel got inspiration for this project after visiting a refugee camp in Calais, speaking to people and hearing their stories firsthand along with the proposal of Wales becoming the first Nation of Sanctuary ('Welsh Foil Blankets', 2021).

For generations, the Welsh blanket has provided warmth and security in traditional Welsh culture. This contrasts with the emergency blankets which are very thin, with associations of people fleeing from war zones, leaving their home behind. This piece extends our notion of tradition and heritage while embracing a more modern, multicultural and diverse Wales.

**Clémentine Schneidermann (Collaboration with Charlotte James)**

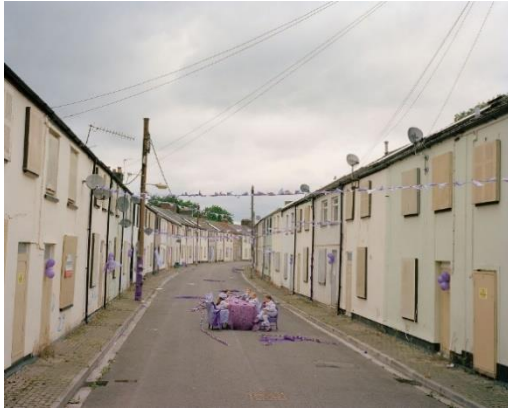


*Fig. 5*



*Fig. 6*



*Fig. 7*

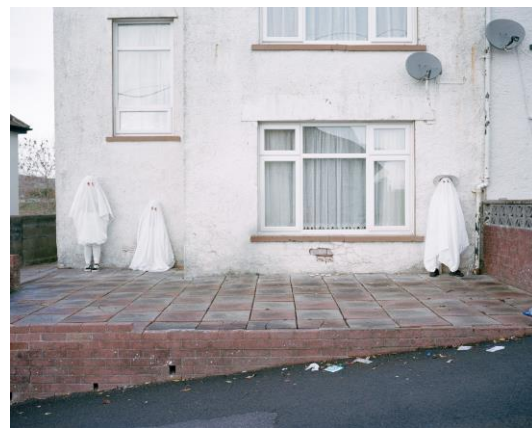


*Fig. 8*

Clémentine Schneidermann is a French documentary photographer based in Paris and South Wales. Her collaboration with stylist Charlotte James aimed to give a different perspective of the Welsh valleys that are often depicted as deprived and depressing. Having lived in the area James wanted to shed light on the people of this community and their post-industrial existence. Her project ‘It’s called Ffasiwn’, aimed to encourage the creativity of the children and people in the area, providing a more human perspective of this close-knit community, with collaboration and participation evident in Schneidermann’s photographs (White, 2021).

Summer Street Party is a good example of this as we see the boarded-up houses of a once thriving community. The street-party gives us a sense of unity, resilience and celebration despite post-industrial struggles as studies suggest the colour lilac possibly represents nostalgia and remembrance (Becker, 2024).

**Natalia Dias**



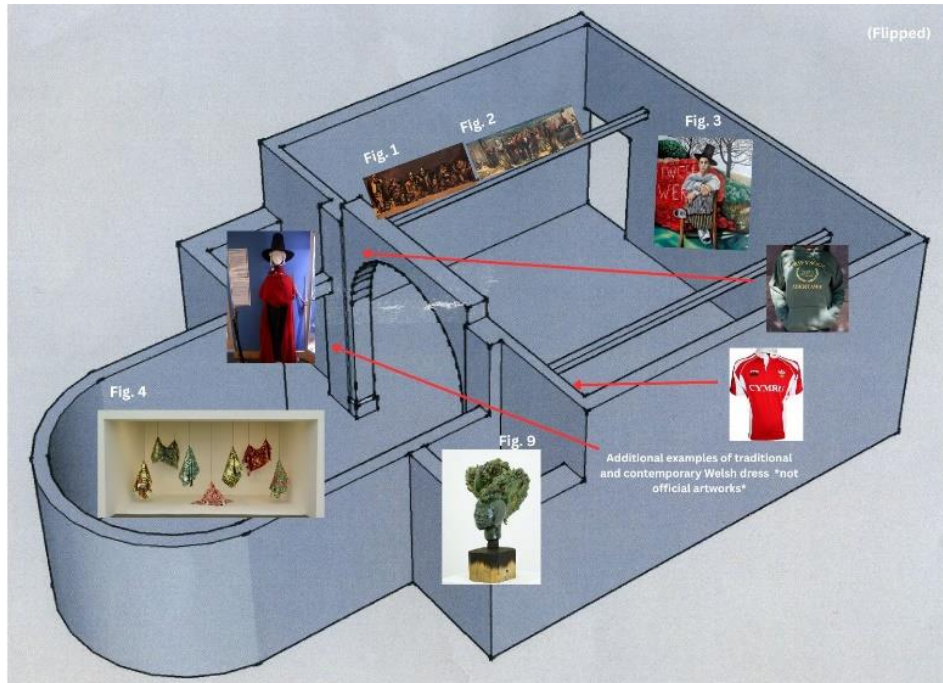
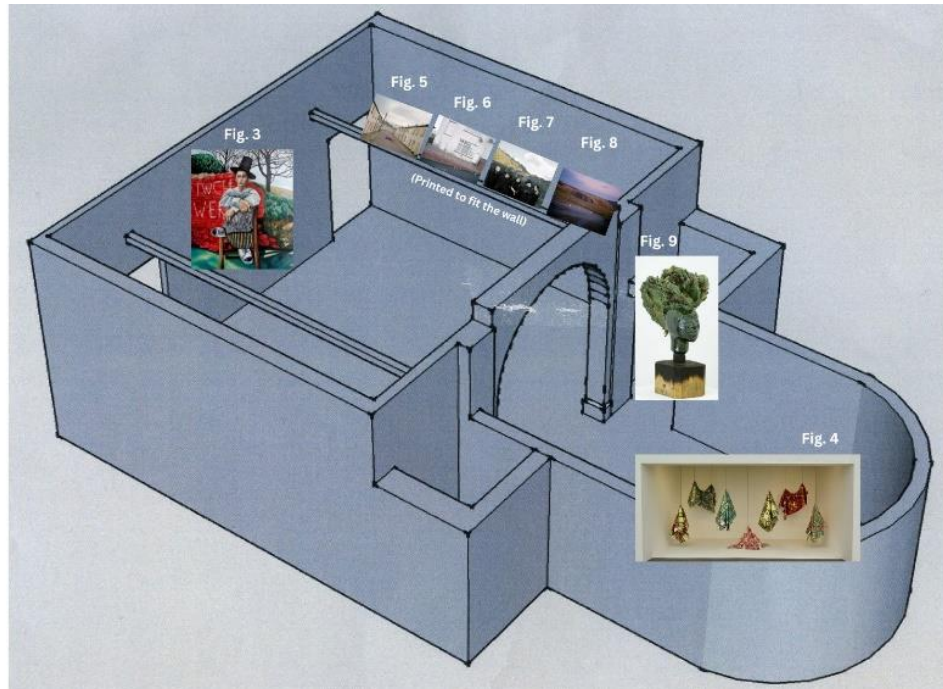
*Fig. 9*

Natalia Dias is a Portuguese born ceramicist who graduated from Cardiff School of Art and Design in 2009 and now resides there. Her work explores form and colours through her own cultural heritage combined with Celtic folklore. In Dias' work BLODEUWEDD 2020, we see a modern depiction of the traditional Welsh Goddess Blodeuwedd, who represents the landscape and nature of Wales. Dias states how she enjoys taking inspiration from the vibrant, polished glazes from her Palissy Ware heritage and intertwining this with mythical Celtic figures, combining her own heritage with traditional Welsh culture (Natalis Dias, 2019).

### **Exhibition layout**

As you enter the square room of Mission Gallery on the right-hand wall you will see Josef Herman's coal miner paintings (see Fig. 1 and Fig. 2). As you look behind, on the wall between the entry archway, you will see Meinir Mathias', 'Cerrigion Coch'. On the left-hand wall, you will find a selection of Clementine Schneidermann's 'Ffasiwn' photographs hung on the wall in a straight line. As you approach the archway leading to the round room, you will find examples of contemporary Welsh dress, including a Swansea University hoodie and a Welsh rugby top hung on each side of the archway. As you enter through the archway into the round room on the left-hand side, you will find Natalia Dias' Blodeuwedd piece displayed on a stand. In the nook adjacent to Dias' ceramic, you will find an example of a traditional Welsh dress hung on the wall. Finally, in the round room, you will see Daniel Trivedy's, Welsh Emergency Blankets, which will be suspended from the ceiling.

### **Mission Gallery - exhibition floorplan**



## List of Figures

Fig. 1 Miners (Study for Festival of Britain Mural), Josef Herman, 1950. Oil on paper laid on board 52.50 x 121.30 cm. Available at:

<https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.nationalgalleries.org%2Fart-and-artists%2F588&psig=AOvVaw0QYlmeZUEJTU416wPdOOJ2&ust=1747223949354000&source=images&cd=vfe&opi=89978449&ved=0CBQQjRxqFwoTCMiGssmyoI0DFQAAAAAdAAA AABAE> (Accessed: 20 April 2025).

Fig. 2 Miners Singing, Josef Herman, 1950-1951. Oil and crayon on essex board with plaster ground 43.5 x 121.6 cm. Available at:

[https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&url=https%3A%2F%2Fmuseum.wales%2Fcollections%2Fonline%2Fobject%2F04f9d166-a11f-3ddf-a99d-935ebca82787%2FMiners-singing%2F%3Ffield0%3Ddatabase%26value0%3Dart%26field1%3Dwith\\_images%26value1%3Don%26page%3D457&psig=AOvVaw1xI9Onm-G1f2kQUqG1gOOof&ust=1747224093807000&source=images&cd=vfe&opi=89978449&ved=0CBQQjRxqFwoTCND\\_m42zoI0DFQAAAAAdAAAABAL](https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&url=https%3A%2F%2Fmuseum.wales%2Fcollections%2Fonline%2Fobject%2F04f9d166-a11f-3ddf-a99d-935ebca82787%2FMiners-singing%2F%3Ffield0%3Ddatabase%26value0%3Dart%26field1%3Dwith_images%26value1%3Don%26page%3D457&psig=AOvVaw1xI9Onm-G1f2kQUqG1gOOof&ust=1747224093807000&source=images&cd=vfe&opi=89978449&ved=0CBQQjRxqFwoTCND_m42zoI0DFQAAAAAdAAAABAL) (Accessed: 20 April 2025).

Fig. 3 Cerrigion Coch (Red Stones), Meinir Mathias 2020. Oil on Linen 70 x 80 cm. Available at: <https://meinirmathias.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/cerrigcochion-copy-2.jpg> (Accessed: 20 March 2025).

Fig. 4 Welsh Emergency Blankets (Installation at National Eisteddfod), Daniel Trivedy, 2019. Printed metallised polyethylene terephthalate, measurements unknown. Available at:

<https://th.bing.com/th/id/R.cccbe88dfb64e7069e734b7571962575?rik=NGuoO6Y%2bL2bj9w&riu=http%3a%2f%2fwww.danieltrivedy.com%2fuploads%2f7%2f1%2f4%2f3%2f7143134%2ffinal-installation-eisteddfod.jpg&ehk=A3dg3LqGttC7PAQ8oe0EqEU1kg5mEBbFz5BAKvAtF60%3d&risl=&pid=ImgRaw&r=0> (Accessed: 20 March 2025).

Fig. 5 Summer Street Party, Merthyr Vale, 2018, Clémentine Schneidermann and Charlotte James. Photograph. Available at: <https://prod-lensculture-photos.s3.amazonaws.com/original/634a491b-3680-40cd-8fe3-26f4c1ea8d02.jpg> (Accessed: 1 May 2025).

Fig. 6 Last Days of Summer, Blaenavon, 2018, Clémentine Schneidermann and Charlotte James. Photograph. Available at: <https://prod-lensculture-photos.s3.amazonaws.com/original/8f40b856-4de8-4c14-9e10-d37a469ee350.jpg> (Accessed: 1 May 2025).

Fig. 7 It's Called Fashion (Look it Up), Merthyr Tydfil, 2016, Clémentine Schneidermann and Charlotte James. Photograph. Available at: <https://prod-lensculture-photos.s3.amazonaws.com/original/109cfe66-5065-4455-aa14-9426c9a08edc.jpg> (Accessed: 1 May 2025).

Fig. 8 Ghosts, Merthyr, 2018, Clémentine Schneidermann and Charlotte James. Photograph. Available at: <https://photos.lensculture.com/contain/2340x/f2f0baf8-5cfc-4e07-84dc-48524a07e08d.jpg> (Accessed: 1 May 2025).

Fig. 9 BLODEUWEDD (National Gallery of Wales Collection), Natalia Dias, 2020. Porcelain + wood oak 59 cm high x 33 cm wide x 36 cm deep. Available at: <https://images.squarespace-cdn.com/content/v1/5681b28d57eb8de3966a9fc5/1659105868688-C7MNR0NHJCK29Q0XVAVB/Blodeuwedd.jpg?format=500w> (Accessed: 1 May 2025).

## References

- Becker, L. (2024) *Colour Theory Explained*. Available at: <https://colortheoryexplained.com/lilac-color-psychology/> (Accessed: 1 May 2025).
- Carradice, P. (2012) *Joe Bach: A Polish artist in Wales*. Available at: [https://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/waleshistory/2012/05/joseph\\_herman\\_polish\\_artist.html](https://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/waleshistory/2012/05/joseph_herman_polish_artist.html) (Accessed: 20 April 2025).
- George, A. (2015) *The curator's handbook: museums, commercial galleries, independent spaces*. London: Thames and Hudson Ltd.
- Gray, M. (2018) *Josef Herman: the Polish painter who found himself in Wales*. Available at: <https://artuk.org/discover/stories/josef-herman-the-polish-painter-who-found-himself-in-wales> (Accessed: 20 April 2025).
- Howell, D. R. (2015) 'Telling the Story of Welsh Art-But Is Anyone Listening?', *The Museum Journal*, 58(4), pp. 423-433.
- Mathias, M. (2023) *Meinir Mathias Artist*. Available at: <https://meinirmathias.com/about/> (Accessed: 20 March 2025).
- McAllister, F. (2018) *Visits to Tourist Attractions in Wales 2017*. Beaufort Research Ltd. Available at: [Visits to Tourist Attractions in Wales 2017 - Summary](#) (Accessed: 20 March 2025).
- Mission Shop* (2024, August 29). Mission Gallery. Available at: <https://www.missionshop.co.uk/> (Accessed: 20 March 2025).
- Natalia Dias* (2019) Available at: <https://www.gallery-ten.co.uk/natalia-dias> (Accessed: 1 May 2025).
- Natalia Dias (no date) Natalia Dias. Available at: <https://www.nataliadias.com/read-me> (Accessed: 1 May 2025).
- Price, S. (2024) *Ar Hyd y Nos: Meinir Mathias confirms status as one of Wales' leading artists at new show*. Available at: <https://nation.cymru/culture/ar-hyd-y-nos-meinir-mathias-confirms-status-as-one-of-wales-leading-artists-at-new-show/> (Accessed: 20 March 2025).

Stevens, C. (2002) 'Welsh Peasant Dress' - Workwear or National Costume?', *Textile History*, Vol.33 (1), p.63-78. Available at: [https://librarysearch.uwtsd.ac.uk/permalink/44WHELF\\_UWTSD/1ir6fgh/cdi\\_pubmed\\_primary\\_20707024](https://librarysearch.uwtsd.ac.uk/permalink/44WHELF_UWTSD/1ir6fgh/cdi_pubmed_primary_20707024) (Accessed: 4 April 2025).

'Swansea Council' (2021) Census return for 2021 Census: population characteristics, Oystermouth Road, Civic Centre subdistrict, County of Glamorganshire. Public Record Office: (piece number unknown), (folio number unknown), p. 1 (2024) Available at: URL (Accessed: 20 March 2025).

Tryweryn: *The stories behind drowned village Capel Celyn* (2023) Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-64799911> (Accessed: 20 March 2025).

'Welsh Foil Blankets' (2021) *The Story of Welsh Art, series 1, episode 3. BBC Two Television*. 15 March, 21:00.

White Cube. (2022, March 23). Tate. Available at: <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/w/white-cube> (Accessed: 20 April 2025).

White, R. (2019) *it's called ffasiwn*. Available at: <https://i-d.co/article/its-called-ffasiwn-charlotte-james-clementine-schneidermann-martin-parr-foundation-wales/> (Accessed: 1 May 2025).

## **Bibliography**

Green, A. (2018) *Cymru mewn 100 Gwrthrych*. Llandysul: Gomer Press.

Jones, H. D. (2014) 'Redefining Art and Culture: The Welsh Arts Council's 'Art and Society' Exhibition Series 1969-76', *Visual culture in Britain*, 15(1), pp. 28-49.

Madsen, R. (2024) 'Heritage, identity and the creative arts in the South Wales Valleys', *National identities*, 26(3), pp. 237-265.

Williams, T. G. (2004) *Hunaniaeth Gymreig Welsh identity*. Rhiwfawr: Rhiwfawr Writers Group.

**Word Count:** 1,626 + Reference list, Figures and Bibliography