

This case study examines the CELF website and associated social media presence as a contemporary example of networked digital heritage practice in Wales. CELF operates as the national contemporary art gallery for Wales through a dispersed gallery network that loans works from the national collections, positioning access to art as a shared cultural responsibility rather than the preservation of a single institution. Central to this model is the website, which functions as both a public-facing platform and a digital hub through which national collections are made visible, accessible, and mobile.

Through digitisation of collections, bilingual content, and image-led design, CELF seeks to democratise access to contemporary art while embedding this practice within a distinctly Welsh cultural and linguistic context. The website and social media channels, therefore, offer a valuable case study for examining how heritage institutions respond to broader shifts towards digital, decentralised, and participatory models of engagement.

The case study analyses CELF's institutional image and self-representation, the role of social media as a tool for outreach and participation, digital access to collections and archives, and the platform's engagement with wider scholarly debates on heritage, power, and authority. By drawing on digital heritage, museum studies, and critical theory, this analysis evaluates both the strengths and limitations of CELF's digital strategy, arguing that while the platform prioritises accessibility and collaboration over traditional authority, it ultimately demonstrates how national collections can be reimagined through networked, bilingual, and exploratory digital heritage practices.

Firstly, looking at the institutional image and self-representation that is betrayed by the website, there are very clear visual and design choices made. These are clean image-led layouts, an emphasis on artworks – not buildings or people, as well as a modern minimal aesthetic that is consistent with contemporary art.

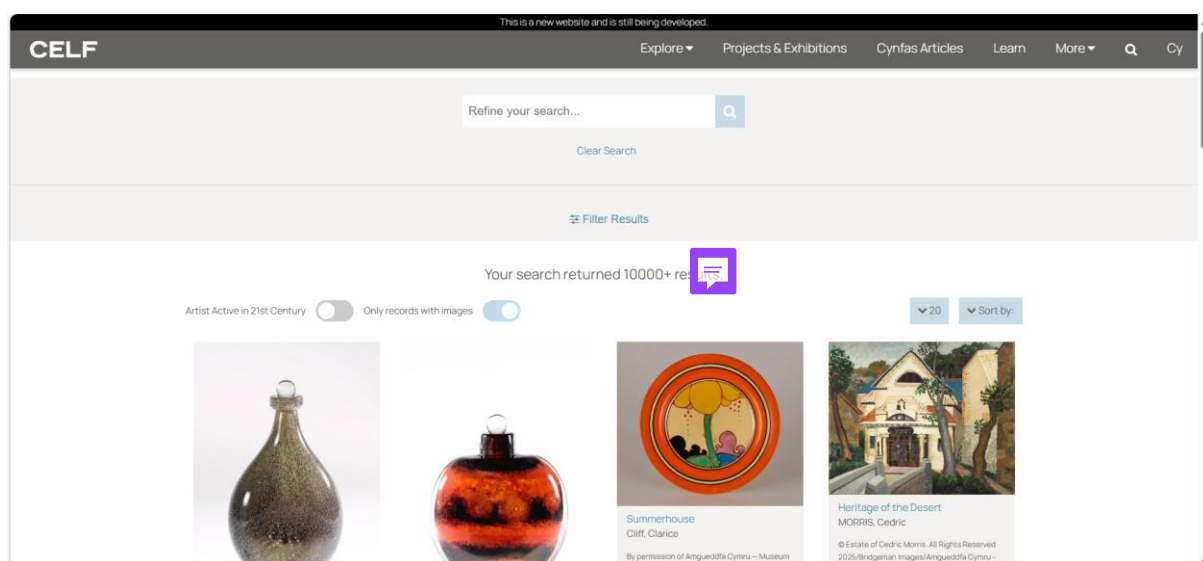


**Figure 1.** CELF homepage showing a clean, image-led layout prioritising artworks over institutional architecture or personnel, reinforcing a contemporary and visually driven digital identity.

Most importantly, the inclusion of the Welsh Language – the website is fully bilingual. These design choices are important as they show the institution to be collections-focused as well as promoters of Welsh culture and linguistics, while still being forward-thinking and modern. This is such an important addition as it shows that heritage and tradition can go side by side with modern and forward-thinking. This also links to current digital heritage discourse; Kenderdine and Shaw argued that contemporary digital heritage environments should reduce illustrative explanation so that visual material can function independently as an aesthetic experience.<sup>1</sup> This is where CELF has allowed the artworks, rather than institutional narration, to structure meaning.

However, while the reduction of explanatory text enables artworks to function as independent aesthetic experiences, this approach may also risk excluding users who rely on contextual framing or accessibility support. A highly image-led interface can privilege visually confident users while offering less support to those with visual impairments, limited digital literacy, or restricted access to high-speed internet. In this sense, the same design strategies that reduce institutional mediation may also introduce new forms of exclusion.

Furthermore, Marty argues that their study has shown that online museum visitors use digital images of artefacts and data in their daily lives, which shows that museum websites are most effective when they prioritise visual access to artworks rather than buildings, branding, or curatorial authority figures.<sup>2</sup> This is how the CELF website is set up, even the front page is saturated with images of the art collections.

Moreover, the inclusion of the Welsh language is also a symbiotic power. It shows the inclusivity of the native language that has long been ignored in hierarchical structures. In addition, phrasing used on the website furthers inclusivity and collaboration, with the avoidance of overly academic or hierarchical language. This shows that the collaborative network of CELF is not just a symbol but a full embodiment through digital image and presence. Bourdieu argues that language is a form of symbolic power, where the public recognition of certain languages legitimises and grants social authority to those languages; oppositely, the exclusion of other languages can marginalise those who speak them.<sup>3</sup> From this perspective, CELF bilingual presentation can be understood as a refusal to privilege a single “legitimate” language, redistributing linguistic authority more evenly across its audience.

---

<sup>1</sup> Sarah Kenderdine and Jeffrey Shaw, ‘New Media in Situ: The Re-socialisation of Public Space’, pp. 259-260.

<sup>2</sup> Paul F. Marty, ‘Museum Websites and Museum Visitors: Digital Museum Resources and Their Use’, pp. 88-89.

<sup>3</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*.

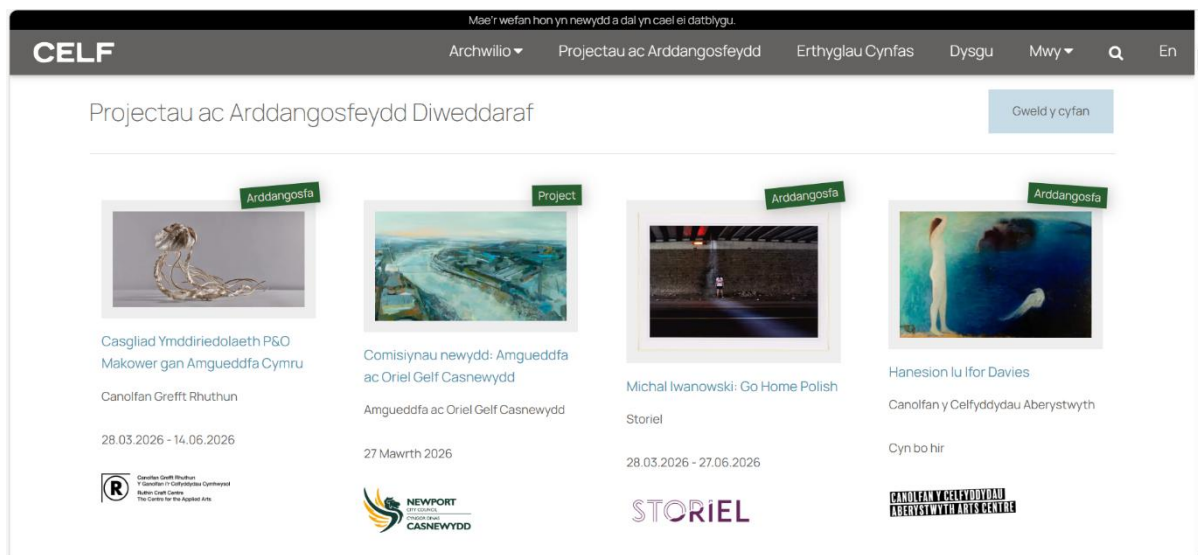


**Figure 2.** CELF website bilingual interface, demonstrating equal visual and functional status for Welsh and English, challenges the dominance of a single institutional language.

Bourdieu also reflects on institutional language's ability to mask power by presenting itself as neutral, while in reality, they reinforce hierarchical relationships between the creator and the audience.<sup>4</sup> Whereas CELF's collaborative phrasing, such as:

"CELF brings the national collection of contemporary art to communities across Wales. We are a partnership network that draws on local interest and stories to foster pathways for engaging with Wales' art collection."<sup>5</sup>

Shows a strategy that softens institutional authority and invites participation through words such as "communities", "partnership", "network" and "foster".

This also links to the fact that CELF is digitally presented as a network, where CELF is the facilitator rather than a controlling authority. The prominence of the partners in the digital sphere reinforces this decentralisation. Linking in museum studies theories, Bennet argues that museums should be understood as a collection of practices, sites and relationships, rather than single, self-contained authorities.<sup>6</sup> While this could be difficult for some museums, CELF's digital presence and purpose of being a hub embodies what Bennet is arguing, the website connects collections, galleries and communities rather than operating as a singular institution. Bennet has also argued that decentralised models of display and curation challenge traditional hierarchies by redistributing authority across different groups and locations, especially when museums develop their relationships with communities and other institutions.<sup>7</sup> An example of where this is successfully achieved on the website is the *Projects and Exhibitions* page. All activity is clearly shown to be taken across multiple partner venues rather than one central location. Each project is clearly associated with a specific

<sup>4</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*.

<sup>5</sup> [Homepage | CELF](#)

<sup>6</sup> Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory*, pp. 109-111.

<sup>7</sup> Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory*, pp. 122-126.

partner gallery or museum, reinforcing CELF's role as a coordinating platform rather than a controlling authority. CELF does not frame itself as the sole narrating voice; instead, it facilitates connections between institutions, artworks, and local audiences. This aligns closely with Bennett's call to move away from centralised museum power towards decentralised networks of cultural production, where meaning emerges through collaboration rather than prescription.

In addition to the website, CELF also effectively uses their Instagram account as a digital outreach tool to further the identity created via the website. Their Instagram account is shown as a primary engagement and outreach tool, which is a gateway to the website, exhibition programme and partner institutions. It also reinforces CELF's identity as accessible, visual and participatory. The account shows clear cross-platform linking, enhances national reach beyond physical sites and reinforces bilingual and inclusive ethos. However, it is limited by the platform as it limits interaction and depth of interpretation; despite this, it is still a successful participatory tool for CELF. Simon argues that for an institution to be participatory, it must prioritise platforms to support this, especially with the ability to allow two-way communication.<sup>8</sup> This supports the notion of viewing CELF's Instagram as an outreach and engagement tool. Simon further suggests that participatory design is most effective when institutions encourage casual interactions that invite users to explore deeper layers of content, rather than confining participation to a single space.<sup>9</sup> This again supports Instagram as a gateway that directs audiences to the CELF website, exhibitions, and partner institutions.

---

<sup>8</sup> Nina Simon, *The Participatory Museum*, Ch. 1.

<sup>9</sup> Nina Simon, *The Participatory Museum*, Ch. 1.

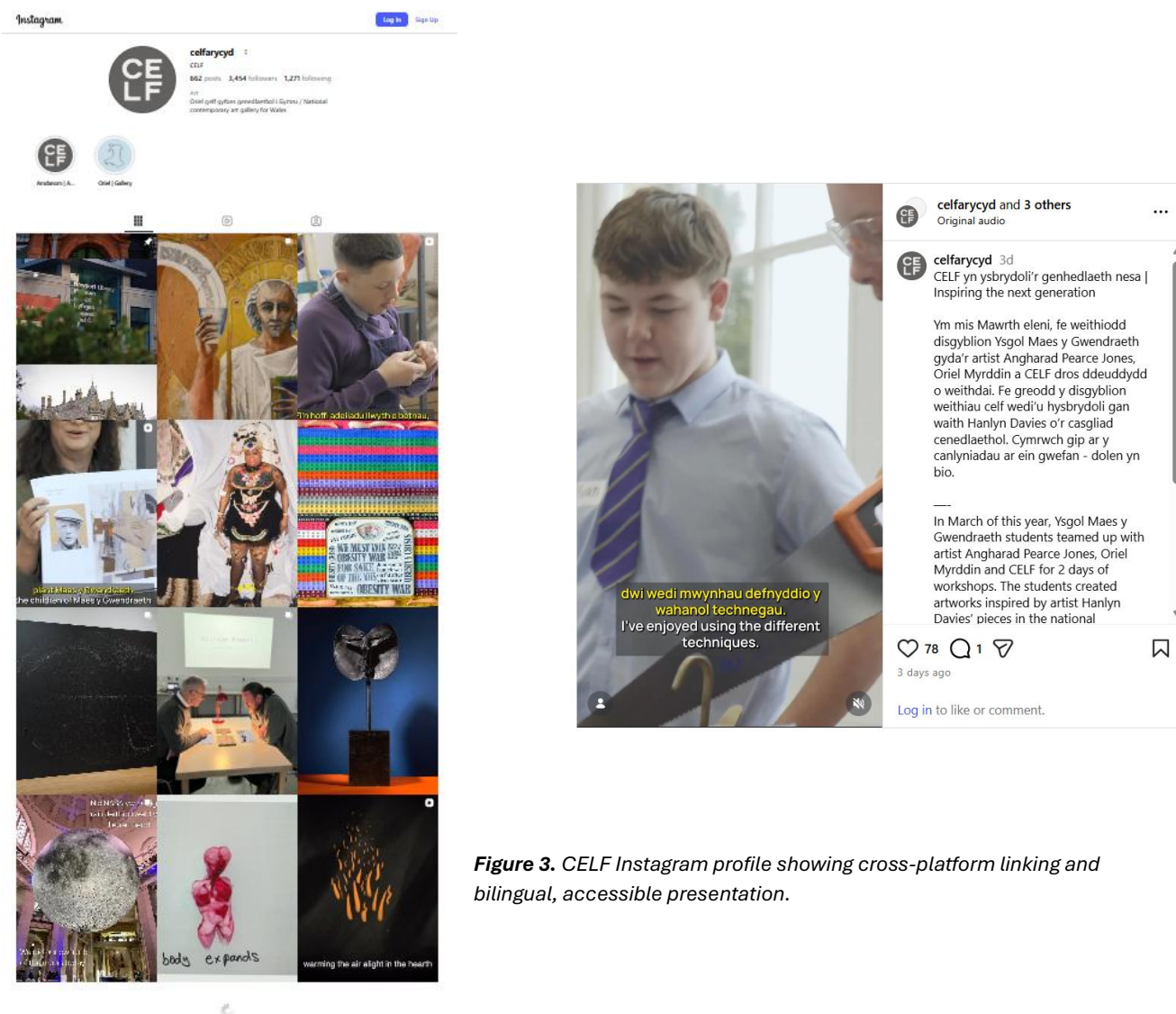


**Figure 3.** CELF Instagram profile showing cross-platform linking and bilingual, accessible presentation.

Moreover, this is also supported by Highfield and Leaver, who argue that visual social media platforms such as Instagram have become central spaces of everyday communication, a place where images operate as primary vehicles for engagement and information sharing rather than decoration to text.<sup>10</sup> This situates CELF in a space where they are entering spaces where audiences feel the most comfortable, the notion of going to them rather than making them come to you. The equivalent in a physical world would be a museum going to a local community centre to do outreach rather than expecting the community to visit the museum.

Added to the participatory nature of the CELF website and social media, they are presented as a portal to collections. The other main benefit of their digital presences is that they bring together national art collections from Amgueddfa Cymru and the National Library of Wales. However, they do not present in a traditional sense as the website prioritises access and visibility over comprehensive, deep archival research,

<sup>10</sup> Tim Highfield, and Tama Leaver, 'Instagrammatics and Digital Methods: Studying Visual Social Media, from Selfies and GIFs to Memes and Emoji', pp. 47-49.

and it acts as a portal rather than an archive. While this does lack depth, it does allow for and encourage exploration and decentralised viewing of the national collection.

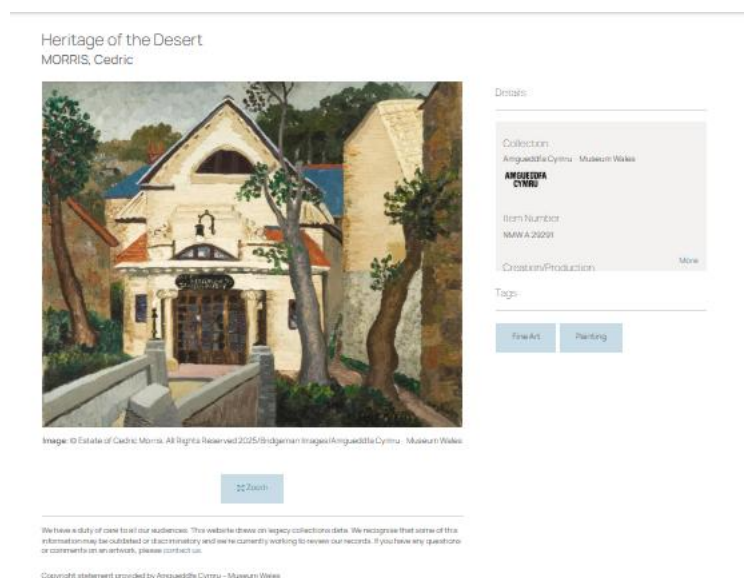


**Figure 4.** CELF artwork page emphasising visual access to the collection while providing limited contextual and interpretive information, illustrating the platform's function as a portal rather than a comprehensive digital archive.

Foucault argues that knowledge should not be understood as belonging to privileged authors, unified works, or authorised disciplines, but as a dispersed field of statements that can emerge wherever the conditions of discourse allow.<sup>11</sup> CELF operates on this same principle by refusing to position culture, learning, or interpretation as centred in a single authoritative voice or location. Instead, it creates conditions in which knowledge can emerge across contexts, sites, and participants. He further argues that ideas do not develop in a neat, straight line. Instead, they change over time, break apart, overlap, and shift, so understanding them means paying attention to gaps, connections, and changes rather than looking for one fixed or complete story.<sup>12</sup> This links to CELF as it is a framework that promotes exploratory engagement, where users move laterally through material instead of following a prescribed narrative or methodical pathway.

Moreover, Derrida stated that the archive is inseparable from place and power: “there is no political power without control of the archive”.<sup>13</sup> Centralised archives reinforce institutional authority by controlling where cultural memory resides and who can engage with it. The Decentralised viewing of CELF disrupts this model. By allowing the national collection to be encountered across multiple locations, platforms, or contexts, archival authority is redistributed. The collection no longer belongs solely to a single institution or physical site but becomes a shared cultural resource. This aligns with Derrida’s claim that archives shape the future as much as the past.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, pp. 28-30.

<sup>12</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, pp. 7-11.

<sup>13</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, p. 11.

<sup>14</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, pp. 18-19.

Decentralisation enables multiple publics to interpret, reuse, and recontextualise the collection, ensuring that national memory is not fixed but continually renegotiated.

This case study has examined the CELF website and associated social media presence as a contemporary example of networked digital heritage practice in Wales. Through analysis of visual design, language use, digital access to collections, and participatory outreach, CELF emerges as an institution that consciously resists centralised authority in favour of collaboration, accessibility, and decentralisation.

The website's clean, image-led design foregrounds artworks over institutional architecture or curatorial voice. The fully bilingual Welsh-English presentation further positions CELF as culturally inclusive, redistributing symbolic power through language and reinforcing the relevance of Welsh heritage within a national framework. Linguistic and visual choices are therefore not merely aesthetic but ideological, shaping how authority, access, and belonging are communicated online.

CELF's digital identity is strengthened through its presentation as a network rather than a singular authority. The visibility of partner institutions across the website, particularly through project and exhibition listings, demonstrates a decentralised model of cultural stewardship consistent with museum studies theories of shared authority. This networked approach allows national collections to circulate across communities, challenging traditional hierarchies of display and ownership.

Social media, particularly Instagram, extends this identity by functioning as a primary outreach and engagement tool. CELF's visual-first, bilingual Instagram presence acts as a gateway to exhibitions, the website, and partner venues, reinforcing accessibility and participation while acknowledging the platform's limits in interpretive depth and dialogue.

At the same time, CELF's digital model is not without limitations. Its prioritisation of visibility over depth can restrict contextual understanding and accessibility for some users, and its portal-based structure lacks the comprehensive interpretive framework of a traditional digital archive. Yet, as this case study has shown, these limitations are also intrinsic to CELF's broader commitment to exploration, decentralisation, and participatory access.

Ultimately, CELF demonstrate how national collections can be reimagined through digital platforms that foreground collaboration, linguistic inclusivity, and shared cultural authority. As such, it provides a compelling example of how heritage institutions can balance tradition and innovation while responding to contemporary debates in digital and participatory heritage.

## Bibliography

Bennett, Tony, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London: Routledge, 1995).

Bourdieu, Pierre, *Language and Symbolic Power*, ed. by John B. Thompson, trans. by Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991).

Derrida, Jacques, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. by Eric Prenowitz, *Diacritics*, 25.2 (1995), pp. 9-63.

Foucault, Michel, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 1969).

Highfield, Tim, and Tama Leaver, 'Instagrammatics and Digital Methods: Studying Visual Social Media, from Selfies and GIFs to Memes and Emoji', *Communication Research and Practice*, 2.1 (2016), 47–62 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/22041451.2016.1155332>> [accessed 1 May 2026].

[Homepage | CELF](#)

Kenderdine, Sarah, and Jeffrey Shaw, 'New Media in Situ: The Re-socialisation of Public Space', *International Journal of Arts and Technology*, 2.4 (2009), 258–276 <<https://www.jeffreyshawcompendium.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Kenderdine-Sarah-Jeffrey-Shaw-New-media-in-situ-The-re-socialisation-of-public-space.pdf>> [accessed 1 May 2026].

Marty, Paul F., 'Museum Websites and Museum Visitors: Digital Museum Resources and Their Use', *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 23.1 (2008), 81–99 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/09647770701865410>> [accessed 1 May 2026].

Simon, Nina, *The Participatory Museum* (Santa Cruz, CA: Museum 2.0, 2010), ch. 1 <<https://participatorymuseum.org/chapter1/>> [accessed 1 May 2026].