

Report: Site-Specific Exhibition

Name: Suzanna Borowiec

2205110

Site Specific Exhibition Title: Three Silent Nights

Rationale

The Coach House, found amid Swansea's Wind St., is a standard local pub that does not truly hold a factor that distinguishes it from the others, apart from its history, and the social importance it holds as a concept. Firstly, built in the 19th Century, it started off as what it has circled back to – a place where people would indulge in the drinking culture, which highlights the prevalence of alcohol in the western culture throughout centuries. In 1941, between 19th and 21st of February, the tragic Three Nights' Blitz bombing struck the Wind St., with many sites turning into piles of rubble, the Coach House building survived. In the 1970-80s, the site took on a much rougher edge, becoming a highly popular music venue that housed many rock bands, music enjoyers, and like always, people looking to have a drink.

The title of our exhibition "Three Silent Nights" has come from the history of the Three Nights Blitz. We decided this would be the most appropriate title as it conceptualizes our work that tackles the history of Wind St, both past and present. The individual works presented all capture a part of the site that comes alive at night, with the title also playing at the fact that the exhibition was open for 3 days, at a site with a limited audience.

As a group, we decided to respond to the site individually, tackling the sites past, present and future in different contexts. Amber took on the past approach, using the archive and the Three Nights Blitz to create bunting that reflects on the tragedy. Nikolett focused her piece on the site's popular history with music, creating installations on the bar and DJ booth to incorporate the past with the present in the site. Carys experimented with the future of Wind St, using Artificial Intelligence to showcase the possibilities of what the site can turn into, projected on a television screen. Harvey tackled the present with the social aspect of the site, photographing people picking up a glued coin which he then placed on the coins themselves, scattering them around the site for people to pick up. For my work, I focused on the social aspect of the site, specifically the drinking culture that has been around for centuries. Titling the work "*Iechyd Da*" (translating to "*Cheers*"), in order to draw attention to the fact that it is the Welsh night life that is being showcased. I camouflaged into the busy night life of Wind St, documenting what I experienced, then incorporating the photographs into the space by sticking vinyl onto the tables of the site. The goal was for the viewers to reflect upon themselves, placing a pint down onto the vinyl and being taken back to their last night out, or the

night they are about to experience. Alongside the vinyl printed photographs, I included a zine to push forward a fuller narrative of the nights out, as well as allowing the viewers to get a deeper look into the project.



Top row in order from left to right – figure 1. Project's Site, The Coach House. Figure 2. Amber's WIP. Figure 3. Nikolett's WIP.

Bottom row in order from left to right – Figure 4. Harvey's WIP. Figure 5. Carys' WIP. Figure 6. Personal WIP.

(Taken by Suzanna Borowiec, 2024)

A Summary of the Research

In this project, I have conducted different types of research, such as visits to the archive to collect data and archival photographs, visited traditional exhibitions around Swansea to get a sense of the layout for the installation, as well as conducting secondary research on the history of the chosen site. The most influential research for the final installation has been primary research done through visiting the site multiple times, experimentation with different types of photography that pushed my ideas forward, as well as using secondary research to view different artists who have also captured the night life scene in different ways.

Experimentation

The experimentation carried out as research for the final installation was a very successful method in order to achieve my final outcome. Starting off on Wind St., taking long exposures of the passersby and myself to explore the themes of isolation in the night life scene allowed me to move forward and decide on a stronger theme to focus on. The outcomes from the first experimentation were not successful as they did not have the desired effect I was trying to portray; therefore, it pushed me to experiment further. With further experimentation, using conceptually aligned tools to capture the nightlife, I was able to pay closer attention to what I was doing and what tools I was using, and how those factors can be implemented in the final exhibit.

Artist Research

After using experimentation as a research method, I decided I want to delve deeper into capturing people instead of myself, therefore I looked at artists that influenced how I went about visiting the site and what the possibilities that come with it, are. Through the experimentation I had a certain atmosphere I wanted to capture, done through the use of film photography, therefore looking at other artists who approached the topic differently allowed me to get a different outlook and develop ideas that were beneficial for the final photographs. The biggest influence on this project has been Maciej Dakowicz's *Cardiff After Dark* (2012) series of photographs. As the title states, Dakowicz captures the nightlife scene of Cardiff, showcasing how a busy city of Wales, just like Swansea, can be captured. This was very beneficial as the work is very current and close to my project, it allowed me to come to a conclusion of the type of photographs I want to take in this project. Dakowicz's photographs were taken on a digital camera, which through looking at the outcome I decided I want to achieve a much grittier and rougher atmosphere with my photographs, therefore deciding to use a film camera to achieve more grain and edge. The focus between Dakowicz and myself stays the same, I also wanted to capture a variety of people throughout the night, typically out on the street after the bars and clubs have closed, with chips spilling out and people passing out on the cold concrete – the common reality of a night out in Wales. I have also looked at the work of Mischa Haller, and the *"Not Going Home"* (1998) series, similarly to Dakowicz, Haller also captures the British nightlife scene, differentiating through capturing the scene in the late 90s, with more grit and blur, which is something that I implemented in my project. Lastly, I have been inspired by Ewen Spencer's *"While You Were Sleeping"* (2024), taken between 1998-2000, Spencer captures London's electric nightlife, this time, the artist captures close ups of the party goers in black and white, focusing on the life inside the clubs as well as the expressions and enjoyment of the people. Spencer's project presents a similar amount of grit as Haller but doing so in black and white and getting a lot closer to the subjects, which is something I experimented with when photographing on site. Overall, the combination of the work of these 3 artists, I came to a conclusion of the type of photographs I aimed to take, the atmosphere and the way I captured the subject, using methods of all 3 artists, such as using closeups, portraying grit, and showcasing life on the streets when the party is ending.



Figure 7. Maciej Dakowicz, *Cardiff After Dark* (2012)



Figure 8. Mischa Haller, *Not Going Home* (1998)



Figure 9. Ewen Spencer, *While You Were Sleeping* (2024)

Visiting the site

In this project, my focus has been the social aspect of Wind St., therefore I carried out primary research by spending time in the area to gather material for the final installation. Over the course of the project I visited the site 4 times, starting at 8-9pm and finishing off at 6am. The first time I carried out my research this way I did not pay attention to blending into the environment which made it difficult to observe the social life closely, therefore with the attempts made afterwards I made sure to be a part of the environment as much as possible. This included dressing differently, to reflect the way others dressed on a night out, as well as being more open towards the site and people around to ensure I am a part of the scene. The decision to visit the sites on the weekends between the evening and early mornings was to capture and observe the behaviour of people at different stages of the night, which ended up helping me capture enough material to successfully exhibit the project.

Archive Visit

After a group visit to the Swansea Archive, we decided to create a theme of the past, present and the future of the city after looking at the history of Swansea. We established that we would use the newly gained information from the archive to present the past in the exhibition, using old photographs, newspapers and any other relevant information found. Followed by documenting the current day of Wind St to display the present, as well as working with new technological programs such as artificial intelligence to create an element of the future for the exhibition. As a group, it was decided this would be an effective way of showcasing our research and context of the project with our creative applications, working together in creating different parts of the exhibition. After a few group meetings it was decided to change the theme as we have found it challenging to work with a broad theme, which would have covered the whole history of Swansea's Wind St. Within the time limitations we had, we decided it is not a project that is realistic to achieve. A discussion followed on a more realistic theme and ways to move on without sacrificing the information and knowledge already gained. We have instead decided to share within the group what we personally and conceptually would want to showcase within this project. After the discussion, it was concluded that we would achieve more if we created individual pieces of work, instead of working on each piece together, with this decision we have realised that we individually are already tackling the theme of the past, present and future. Therefore, no prior knowledge was lost.

Techniques Developed for the Production of Your Body of Work

Cameras

The tool I have mainly used to conceptualise my project is the cameras I shot with. I started off with experimenting with Nikon D750 DSLR camera in order to capture long exposures and portray alienation, I decided to start off with this camera as I do not use digital cameras in my work, therefore the process of shooting became alien to me, as well as providing ease to capture the long exposures. After evaluating the contact sheet and the use of the camera, the outcomes did not feel aligned with my work aesthetically nor conceptually. Switching my projects focus on the social life and drinking culture of Wind St., I decided to use Sun and Cloud camera, a digital 'toy' camera. I used this camera to experiment as the quality that was produced was grainy and blurred, as well as having the unserious 'toy' factor to it. The camera was the perfect physical manifestation of the drunken state of my subjects, it reflected their out-of-balance, spontaneous state, whilst being inconspicuous enough for me to get close. Unfortunately, the camera ended up not being suitable for nighttime photography, therefore I decided to use an analogue point and shoot camera instead. The reason I chose a point and shoot camera as the tool to capture this project, is due to similar reasons I experimented with the Sun and Cloud, the grain and blur that can be achieved, with its spontaneous

and uncertain (of the outcome) style of shooting, also perfectly reflected the subjects I was photographing. It also allowed me to have slightly more control, with the use of flash which allowed for better exposure. It was also not as gimmicky as the Sun and Cloud, which had a few second delay between pressing the shoot button and the camera taking the picture, which resulted in many empty frames. The first point and shoot camera I used was a Samsung AF Zoom, which was adequate but I decided to use something that provided me with a slight higher quality photographs, therefore I switched and settled with an Olympus mju ii, which I used with black and white rolls of film in order to accentuate and focus on the raw emotions captured in the moment.

Zine

As part of the project, I decided to create a zine as a way of allowing the audience to take something back from the site, a reminder of their indulgence at the site, as well as a deeper dive into my work. The zine required a lot of trial and error. Firstly, I used Adobe InDesign, to design the digital layout of the zine which required some time to figure out due to using it for the first time. I experimented with paper that was available to me, starting off with standard printing paper. The paper was rough and gritty which aligned well with the photographs and the aim of the project, but it was flimsy, and the quality of the photographs was very low. I went back to Adobe InDesign to reupload the photographs in higher quality and used Adobe Acrobat to print, which provided slightly better results but still felt unprofessional for a product that aimed to be taken away by the audience. After cutting, stapling and putting together a dozen copies, I found higher quality paper, smooth and ink absorbent, which provided the quality I was looking for. After continuously playing around with the layout of the photographs, the printing settings and the design, I printed the final 30 copies of the zine which were put together by hand and exhibited.



Figure 10. Creation of Zine, Suzanna Borowiec (2024)

Installation

For the installation of the final piece, I considered different methods and tools to use, such as the use of acetate on the site's mirrors to allow the audience to view themselves, as well as the representation of them that engages in the nightlife scene. This was not possible as Harvey stated that he would use the wall space to put up his prints up, therefore I decided my work would clash too much against his, as well as the mirrors being too high up for anyone to be able to see their reflection. Therefore, I considered the use of the bar's wooden panels, as it would interfere with the customers purchasing alcohol, but that option was also not possible due to Nikolett already taking the space for her work. Hence, I decided the perfect place to showcase my work, whilst responding to the site and gaining audience interaction, would be the site's tables. For this, I decided to print my photographs onto sticky vinyl to stick on the tables, my representation of the drinking culture, culture that is so important to the site, becoming one. With the photographs and site becoming one, the audience is forced to use the tables as they are presented, placing their drinks onto the vinyl reflection of what they engage in.

Individual and Group work overview

My role

My role within the group was to create an individual piece of work, take care of the social media, contribute to the group work and the meetings.

- Contributed to the general ideas for the exhibition by providing research and personal opinions whilst showing the group the work I was producing to ensure the group is moving forward, as well as getting a sense of where the other members of the group are, work wise.
- Provided constructive criticism to the group when I believed the work was heading the wrong direction, this helped us get out of a hole in which we were stuck in – not producing any work. This helped us create a more productive plan and strategy, moving us forward to a successful creation of an exhibition.
- Created a social media page through the use of Instagram. As a group we experimented with different poster designs to post on our social media page, which I followed by adding textual context to get the viewers' attention and interest. Ensured to have everyone's images and artist statement to post prior to the exhibition's opening to build more tension and interest around our exhibition. Visited other site-specific exhibitions during their opening and posted them on our social media page's story to gain traction for the other exhibitions, which in turn did the same for us.
- Worked towards a zine for the group in order for us to have an object for the audience to take away that provides additional context, as well as making the exhibition to look more professional and engaging with

the viewer. During the project, the group has decided not to move on with the zine idea, which is where I took over the zine for my individual work.

- Invigilated the exhibition during the opening times to ensure the safety of the work and the audience, as well as being available to converse with viewers and answer any questions.

Overcoming challenges

Lack of productive communication

Within the group, I have found that communication was not an issue, everyone would communicate with each other through WhatsApp on a frequent basis. The issue was that communication was lacking when it was most necessary and needed the most, such as when needing to create posters, zines, deciding what is happening with our exhibition and any other factors that needed to be discussed to move our project forward. The way I overcame this issue, as much as I could have, was to set deadlines for when certain pieces of work had to be in by such as setting a date for artist statements so they could be posted on the Instagram page. I have also tried to be more constructive with my own communication in hopes of the group doing the same, which was not always the case, but we managed to communicate effectively enough to all open the exhibition together.

Group Dynamic

The group dynamic was the most challenging aspect of this project for me. As the groups were not self-allocated, the group I ended up working with had vastly different opinions, characters and styles of photography, therefore it was difficult to come to an agreement. This would often stall the process as one or more people would not be fully happy about the theme of the exhibition or other aspects of the project. The way we overcame this, was by deciding to work individually and then combining all the work under a theme that worked with everyone's pieces of work, which everyone, for most part, were happy with. Due to the range of personalities within the group, the ideas and designs I put forward would not work for everyone, the dismissal of my work and the ideas would often be the case, as well as the group's worries of the work I will be producing (afraid it'd be too inappropriate for the setting and not in favour of the site's business). This has led me to increasingly become more disconnected from the group and putting less input into group decisions in worries of causing conflict or making the group unhappy. The way I attempted to overcome this was by concentrating on my individual work instead and discussing with the group in a less opinionated manner, which in hindsight, I regret.

Creation of individual work

One of the challenges faced has been the creation of individual work, due to the group's undecided nature as well as personal feelings of artistic blockage, I found it difficult to begin working visually and creating a plan for the exhibition's install. This was not a vast issue as with experimentation I overcame this struggle. Although this has pushed me back timewise, creating stress towards the ending of the project, I was persistent with the creation of nighttime street photography, which succeeded in the end.

Skills learned/ practiced

The key skills I practiced throughout this project were group communication and teamwork. Through this project I have learnt how crucial communication within the group is in order to achieve a successful outcome. This is something that will prepare me for future projects and allow me to conduct groupwork in a much more productive manner, learning from ways I could have improved these skills whilst working. I have also learned flexibility and adaptability skills that pushed my individual work forward and made the final install possible, often having to re-plan and re-think my subject matter as well as the curation of my work within the site. This is a key skill that will benefit my individual and group work, as obstacles and challenges often arise when creating a project, it will allow me to overcome these with ease and push forward to the finalisation of any piece of work.

Evaluation of the Exhibition

Execution of Exhibition

I deem the exhibition an overall success. Individually, the whole group has addressed and responded to the site in a contextual manner, tackling themes of history and community through different aesthetics and personal interpretations of the space. The work transformed the site through the use of multimedia such as installation, moving image, textiles, and photographic prints. Although the group has faced challenges throughout the project, fearing that some members might not be ready to exhibit, we successfully worked towards the installation and opening of the exhibition, which resulted in a professional and polished final outcome.

Audience Interaction

Due to the site's limiting popularity, one of the setbacks we as a group feared, was the amount of audience we would attract. Although the number of visitors was not immense, we received a good amount of attention. The audience would interact with us and the work, allowing us to connect with the audience, provide more context to the work and answer any questions. Since the site already has a given purpose, the audience would walk around the space with a drink in their hand, which was perfect for my aim as glasses of pints and other drinks would get placed on the vinyl covered tables, leaving circle marks as a trace of what they have drank.



Figure 11. Three Silent Night's Exhibition, taken by @lumen_hortus (2024)

Reflection

- Personal engagement – The key area for improvement is personal engagement within the group. Throughout the project, when I felt not listened to or fully respected, I would withdraw both creatively and socially from the rest of the members, which in hindsight regret. Moving forward, I aim to improve my communication skills as well as my engagement even when my emotions are at stake. I have learnt that being confrontational is not negative and can often move the project forward, therefore I should not be afraid to share my ideas and be transparent within any group I am working with.
- Time management – Further area for improvement is my time management skills, which have shown throughout this project. Although I successfully finished the work in time for the install and the opening of the exhibition, I believe if I have more effectively planned my time I could have experimented more as well as gathering more material for the exhibition. This did not affect the project, but moving forward I am aware it is a skill that needs improvement to allow myself the space and time to push my creativity forward without sacrificing other areas of the project.
- Further experimentation – In the future I want to carry on with experimenting in my practice and putting myself out of my comfort zone, taking on roles and projects that are unfamiliar in order to explore my practice and get closer to finding my area in photography.

Illustrations

Figure 9. Brennan, Orla. "While You Were Sleeping by Ewen Spencer." *AnOther*, 20 May 2022, www.anothermag.com/art-photography/gallery/12348/while-you-were-sleeping-by-ewen-spencer/4. Accessed 9 Mar. 2025.

Figure 7. Dakowicz, Maciej. "Cardiff after Dark." *Maciej Dakowicz Photography*, 2012, www.maciejdakowicz.com/cardiff-after-dark/. Accessed 9 Mar. 2025.

Figure 8. Reilly, Nick, and Nick Reilly. "'Not Going Home': The New Book That Captures the Aftermath of 90s Partying." *Rolling Stone UK*, 6 Feb. 2025, www.rollingstone.co.uk/music/features/not-going-home-british-cultural-archive-90s-partying-gallery-47433/. Accessed 10 Mar. 2025.