

FINAL REPORT

'A TANGLED WEB'

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A TANGLED WEB

‘an intricate network suggesting something that was formed by weaving or interweaving’

‘a fabric (especially a fabric in the process of being woven)’

(vocabulary.com, 2023)

Introduction

This body of work engages with storytelling, history, and contemporary documentary in order to explore exploitation, wealth, slavery, poverty, power and capitalism. The work is research-based, employing archival material and contemporary found images alongside theoretical frameworks and original photographic practice.¹ The work takes the form of multi-disciplinary storytelling, using the methods that fit most creatively within the story’s context, often diverging into practices other than photography. Multiple approaches have been inter-woven to create a visual environment that includes photography, weaving, found and created imagery, printing, performance, site rubbings, video and sound, to link a hidden history into modern day practices.

Whilst exploring wider Welsh links to slavery, the work focuses on the production of a rough plain cloth produced in mid-Wales and exported in vast quantities to the West Indies, from the late 1600’s to the early 1800’s. This cloth was known locally as ‘webs’ or, in Welsh, ‘gwe’ and more widely as Brethyn Cartref (home cloth), Welsh Plains or ‘negro cloth’. The cloth was used mainly to clothe enslaved people between 1650 and 1830.

In 1690, it is estimated that 388,000 yards of this cloth was made, in the historical counties of Merionethshire and Montgomeryshire, mostly on looms in houses or sheds called tai gwydd (loom house). In 1750, the production increased to 1,980,000 yards and at its peak in 1812 to 7,736,000 yards. (Evans, C. 2019). Giving some context to these figures, over 8 miles a month was woven at its height to meet the demand of the rising enslaved population of the West Indies, which rose from 87,000 to 743,000 over the same period (Evans, 2021, p. 49). There is very little evidence left of this industry, just a few derelict pandys remain.

¹ The work of the artist Lai Abril has inspired my praxis. Abril describes herself as a research based artis and multi-platform story teller. <https://www.laiaabril.com/about/bio/>

Methodology

For this written piece a variety of sources have been used but the central body is in narrative form, inspired by the work of Saidiya Hartman and the methodology that she describes as *critical fabulation*.² Historical and contextual research, personal experience in the field, weaving cloth for the performance element of the exhibition, all contribute to the methodology. As the work is about telling a story to uncover a little-known history in Wales, it felt appropriate to continue, in part, through creating a narrative. Story telling is fundamental to humans and the narrative of personal experience gives us context and meaning.³

Critical fabulation searches and researches the records to find those omissions that may have been deliberately or accidentally lost. The gaps that cannot be filled through research are filled with speculative narrative, created by the historian or artist, giving voice to the blanks or erasures in the record. This concept translates into the telling of the story through both written and artistic practices, using materials and exploration, as here, to animate the historical record. Narrative accounts from local historians have been used, as have records and images from national and local archives, historical and contemporary non-fiction and fiction, and ultimately, the artist's own images and artefacts.

The concept of historiography takes a critical look at the writing of history. Who wrote the historical record, who had the power of the pen, what parts of history have been erased or silenced? It is common to find the history of monarchy and wealthy families and rare to find the voice and history of ignoble people, the enslaved, paupers and peasants. Here in Wales, the record of the involvement of weaving in trans-Atlantic slavery seems to have undergone erasure, in favour of contemporary stories of Welsh woven cloth from the mid 1800's. The delightful, patterned blankets and beautiful colours of these woven fabrics represent weaving history today. In the 1700's wealthy people went on 'Grand Tours', and when they were no longer able to go round Europe due to the wars with France, they visited areas like the Lake District and north Wales. There are several diary

² A writing method that combines historical research, alongside archival evidence and critical theory to form a fictional narrative, as developed by Saidiya Hartman (Hartman, S. 2021)

³ The sociologist, Laurel Richardson explains that narrative allows us to express and comprehend individuals, cultures, societies and historical periods in their wholeness (Richardson, 1997, p.27)

entries from this time commenting on the number of weavers making cloth for slaves in the West Indies.⁴ However, once again this has been overlooked and/or ignored by many historians, maintaining the erasure.

Hartman herself, sets out to give voice to the gaps and silences in the archive of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and the enslaved. This piece of work intends to give a voice to the involvement of Wales in the trans-Atlantic trade route, the implicit and complicit roles undertaken with or without knowledge of the situation.

⁴ Dr Marian Gwyn <https://podcasts.apple.com/nz/podcast/woolly-morals-part-1/id1565249472?i=1000524710289>

The Story

Characters

Angharad

Born in the county of Merionethshire in 1759 on a tenant farm. Spousal's were undertaken at the age of 18 and with five children, four still living, aged 9, 7, 4 and 11 months, she is still living on a tenant farm just outside Dolgellau and is a pauper constantly threatened with eviction.

Nsia

A young woman from the west coast of Africa, 16 years of age with five brothers and sisters, who has never left her village and expects to be married very soon.

...

'What we recall has as much to do with the terrible things we hope to avoid as with the good life for which we yearn'

Saidiya Hartman, Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route

...

Angharad stands by the fire, baby on her hip, drop spindle in the other hand and a pot of cawl steaming over the fire. It's mid-Wales in the county of Merionethshire and she's cold, the land is rolling and riven with low cloud and rain, it's winter.⁵ When tuppung is over the farming is quiet and the whole family set to spinning and weaving, making cloth to keep themselves warm, on a small loom in a single-story cottage. Living here with her three children, their father and the sheep, life is getting harder.

The landlord has raised the rent again and to try and make ends meet she makes socks from their cloth to sell at market.⁶ The cloth is made from the wool of shearing their own sheep and the little extra the older children can gather, found caught in the hedgerows or on the coconut scented

⁵ Merionethshire now the county of Gwynedd in Wales UK

⁶ In the 17th century only those that owned land paid taxes – 'land tax'. Taxes had increased due to the cost of war.
<https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/private-lives/taxation/overview/taxes18thcentury/>

gorse. Life is hard, they are all hungry and cold.⁷ It's bitter, damp and dark, they must work by candlelight and in the winter, the clouds make it darker, even in the short daylight hours. The father does the weaving in the small, one-roomed cottage and he makes the cloth. She watches him, his hands are sore from the rough wool, he burns tallow candles to see the warp and the weft and weaves for as many hours as he can bear to stand. Wool is not easy to weave, it's 'sticky' and the warp and weft often cling together, creating mistakes in the cloth. This reduces its value, it's hard to see in the candlelight when this happens. When he's finished making the web, they roll it up and tie it, the children will help her carry it to the market, only 3 miles to walk, she hopes the rain will let up.

Angharad takes their goods to market in the nearby town of Dolgellau, they are competing with others that make brethyn cartref (home cloth) on bigger looms, supplied by the Shrewsbury Drapers. Traders come to buy, but not their cloth, it's not the right size for them. Some local people buy to make their own clothes or for lining coffins and wrapping the bodies of their loved ones.⁸ Every penny matters, they must pay their rent and tithes or they will be homeless, as well as paupers.

Across the Atlantic on the western side of Africa a woman, Nsia, is being dragged across the shore to a nearby boat, she is kicking and fighting but the rough sailors are too much for her and she can't keep free. She sees a man in a fine uniform handover blue⁹ rolls of cloth and a copper manilla¹⁰ to her tribal leader, it glints red in the sunlight, she asks, is this what she is worth? Nsia is frightened and scared, what is happening, who are these people, what do they want with her? The small boat takes her to a big ship out in the bay, on route she sees people, who too have their hands and feet manacled, jump overboard but they quickly disappear into the waves. She stays put. On the boat Nsia is taken down into the hull, there are no windows, and she is chained to the deck.¹¹ Furtively,

⁷ The 'little ice age' between 1607 and 1814 brought considerably cooler weather and more severe winters to the UK

⁸ An Act of Parliament in 1666 made this a requirement. A large fine was imposed on anyone who didn't. (Tomos, 2023)

⁹ The cloth was dyed by the Royal Africa Company subcontractors after purchase, to meet the differing demands of Tribes on the West Coast of Africa (Evans, 2021, p. 47)

¹⁰ Copper manilla's were made in Swansea and can be seen in Swansea museum. They were used as currency to buy slaves and the first smelter was built in the Swansea valley in 1717. By the 1800's Wales was producing half of the worlds copper. <https://hafodmorfacopperworks.com/the-past/>

¹¹ Slave chains were made in Birmingham alongside guns and knives. <https://www.positivelybirmingham.co.uk/blogbirminghamslavetrade.html>

Nsia looks around her, is that her brother at the end of a long line of bound people? Nsia hopes not, yet wishes it is, she won't feel so alone if she can be with him.

...

'Massey (2005) describes space as an expanse we travel through such as the ocean and that time and space are inextricably linked. Space suggests a geographical nothingness but Massey argues that this is our cultural hegemony and in ignoring histories we may deny people that have called a space, place. Massey refers to space as a 'surface' and that we are in danger of 'turning geography into history and space into time' with no recognition of difference in the world. In denying that some countries have chosen different paths, they are described as 'under-developed' by capitalist countries and the presumption is that they will eventually develop and become part of the same hegemonic future. There can be no difference (Collis, 2021, pg.8), "It reduces simultaneous coexistence to place in the historical queue." (Massey, 2008, p.23).'

...

At the next market in Dolgellau a trader approaches Angharad and asks if she would like to have a spinning wheel and a larger loom. She could make cloth for the trader from the Shrewsbury Drapers Guild, he is willing to offer good money for webs of the right size. She had been trying to save money for a wheel but the rent rise had put paid to it and she thought how wonderful it would be to spin as much wool in a few hours, as it takes her a whole day to do.¹² The trader says they will only charge a small amount of rent for the loom and the wheel, however they will have to transport the cloth to Shrewsbury and have it measured and paid for there.

The sea is like a raging lion and the salt spray makes Nsia thirsty all the time. Water is bought once a day and a little food too. The stench on the deck is unbearable and some of the others around her begin to get sick. The man next to her is very poorly but no one helps him. Tears roll down her face and mix with the salty sea water, it's hard to tell them apart. Her whole body hurts and her mind is wild with fear and exhaustion. The man next to her dies eventually, along with many others, he is taken away.¹³

¹² 'every little farmer makes webs and scarce a cottager is found without a loom' (Jenkins, 1969, p. 171)

¹³ From the west coast of Africa to the West Indies was known as 'the middle passage' of the trans- Atlantic trade route. It's estimated that 30% of the enslaved died on this route.

Angharad and her spousal agree to take the loom and the wheel. They will have to build a shed on the side of the cottage to put it in and set to work straight away. Angharad has borrowed some wood from her family, that she promises to pay back quickly, in anticipation of their increased cloth production. The shed is on the bare ground, there's no insulation and the biting wind whistles through the cracks, the work is backbreaking. There is enough room now for Angharad to spin indoors, with the help of the children, and in winter they can have a fire. It's so much quicker and soon they are weaving webs that are 200yards long and 7/8 yard wide¹⁴ and able to sell to The Drapers of Shrewsbury.¹⁵

...

Hannah Arendt describes the utopia that might be construed from Marx's concept of the working classes emancipation from labour as the 'emancipation from necessity' (Arendt, 1958, p131) but fears that there will be no 'age of freedom for all' (p130). This idea of a cyclical nature of labour can be seen in contemporary slavery or exploited labour in the cobalt mines of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Capitalism moving around the world to exploit labour in 'under-developed' countries and take them towards the hegemonic future. Arendt points to classical ideas of slavery that freed people from the 'maintenance' of life, suggesting that any labour was slavery as these labours were a drudgery.

...

Nsia feels the ship bump along the dock, they have landed. Where? Across the Atlantic to the east, on the island of Grenada in the West Indies. Her captors release her feet from the deck and then her hands and they are taken up the steep steps to the top deck. The sun is hot on her face and the light bright in her eyes, so bright it hurts after so long in the dark hull.¹⁶ A wooden yolk is put around her neck and links her to the other captives. They are marched and whipped to go faster, Nsia is terrified and looks around for her brother or a familiar face. Behind her she sees a young man from her village, and they exchange desperate glances. Nsia watches children crying, being wrenched from their mothers and women being dragged away from their desperate husbands.

¹⁴ From Sheep to Sugar a project set up to research Welsh Plains and it's links to slavery links

<http://www.spanglefish.com/welshplainsresearch/index.asp?pageid=702725>

¹⁵ 'From 1536 the local woollen industry was restricted by the requirement to sell all local cloth to the Shrewsbury Drapers Company.' (Tomos, 2018, p. 6). They held a monopoly.

¹⁶ The middle passage journey took 8-10 weeks <https://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/international-slavery-museum/floor-plan/enslavement-and-middle-passage>

Now she is being plunged into water, held under and scrubbed with a hard brush, as she kicks she is held down harder and fears she will drown, she loses energy, she is so hungry and weak. They pull her from the bath and she is left to dry in the sun, exposed and naked. Next, oil is being rubbed on her skin and a plain rough woollen simple dress pulled over her head. Nsia is ready for sale, and she keeps hearing them call her number, 196.

Angharad must take the webs by cart to the pandy in Dolgellau to be fulled, with the help of her eldest children. The web is heavy and unruly and the surface uneven. They mustn't let it roll off; it would be so heavy to put back. They get to Dolgellau and have to push the cart another mile, uphill, to the Pandy Mill on the Aran River. They pass other people who are working in the small factories in the town, everywhere is busy and she wishes they lived in town and didn't have to walk three miles with the web. At the pandy, the fuller's assistant comes out and helps them offload the web. There is a strong acrid smell, and the children hold their noses.¹⁷

...

'The connections between transatlantic slavery and the built environment can be complex. Sites of economic activity can show how local areas fit into the bigger picture, but these sites are also likely to change or become obscured by the passage of time. For example, sites associated with the production of 'Welsh plains', a coarse fabric produced in mid-Wales and used to clothe enslaved people, can be difficult to identify, but can, nevertheless, demonstrate the importance of the economy of slavery to some Welsh communities.' (RCAHMW, 2023). *Documenting the ruins of the Pandys is an attempt to stop the erasure of history of the Welsh plains and a part of the 'Tangled Web' that was the trans-Atlantic slave trade and bought huge wealth to the area. In 1748 it was estimated that the 18 fulling mills around Dolgellau were finishing 4 webs a week and making around £37,440 or £6.5M today. By the end of the 1700's it is estimated the trade was worth around £9M in today's money, with 11 web factories in the town.*¹⁸

...

¹⁷ Stale urine is used in the pandy to degrease the wool and clean the cloth followed by a wash with fullers earth. Urine is collected in buckets from the workers houses for a nominal sum. The second part of fulling involved pounding the cloth with hammers to felt it. Fulling was considered a skilled job, smoothing out the warp and weft, with too much pounding and you could get holes in the cloth. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=txaayGH5Ryo>

¹⁸ (Tomos, 2018, p. 8 & 11) <https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/monetary-policy/inflation/inflation-calculator>

Angharad's husband takes a packhorse to Shrewsbury every week to sell the cloth, leaving Wednesday afternoon in order to get to the market on Thursday.¹⁹ It's an arduous and dangerous journey via the Pont Minllyn bridge over the Afon Dyfi. Although very narrow it is the shortest route. At the Shrewsbury Drapers Guild there is a spike to put the web on and the drapers measure the cloth, he always feels like he's been cheated, but he has no choice, they are the only guild outside of London and the law requires him only to sell to them.

Nsia is sold to the East India Company surgeon, Thomas Phillips, an absent sugar plantation and slave owner, originally from Wales but now living in a smart house at 5 Brunswick Square, Bloomsbury in London town. She is taken by another gruelling boat trip to St Vincent and the slave village, given 5 yards of a rough, plain, undyed cloth and a skein of brown cotton, her ration for a whole year, and told to go to the seamstress. The young man from her village receives 10 yards of cloth. Nsia thinks she will be doing different, easier work but she finds herself alongside the men working on the sugar plantation. Life is unbearably hard and horribly cruel. Nsia quickly learns that her life is of little value here and that to stay alive she must be subservient and compliant. A friend is involved in an uprising and is castrated, another lynched.

Shrewsbury Drapers keep putting up the charges for Angharad's loom and wheel, making it hard, once again, to make a living. Angharad and her family move into a back-to-back house, in the upper part of Dolgellau town, leaving behind the hard unrewarding work of tenant farming.²⁰ They live with four families over the two floors. They work in one of the new factories built in town, on the top floor of what is now a tall house, they work the looms that belong to the owner. At the top of the building, they can hear the resounding noise of the industry in the valley, at least six pandys²¹ nearby and lots more in the distance. The sound of the looms and the pandys create a cacophony of noise, day in, day out.²² Their son and daughter work in the factory across the river and when the water level is low they take the short cut across the stepping stones to get to work.²³ The

¹⁹ (Jenkins, 1969, p. 185)

²⁰ (Tomos, 2023)

²¹ Between 1680 and 1835 the number of recorded fullers in Merionethshire grew from 3 to 40 (Jenkins, 1969, p. 177) and evidence has been found of 60 fulling mills in Merioneth. Ibid (pg. 173)

²² 'Here flannels webs and tenters form a pleasing contrast to the verdure of the dales.

Instead of the sullen silence of indolence -- the incessant monotony of looms, fulling-mills, and other machineries, sound more grateful, and much more profitable, music, to the manufacturer's ear, than the most favourite oratorio of Handel' (Davies, p. 392)

²³ The Shrewsbury Drapers lose their monopoly and local merchants and those from Liverpool move in.

tenterfields are on the southern slopes of the valley, the fuller stretches the cloth out on the hooks to dry it flat, the young children help. The area is a hive of activity, and they all work really hard, for as little as 14d per day, but they are no longer threatened with eviction.

Nsia receives an umbrella from her owner, Thomas Phillips, to keep the sun off her head. Not for use in the fields when she is planting, tending and harvesting sugar cane under the beating Caribbean sun, but to use on Sundays when she must attend church on the estate. This is a kind gesture and Phillips is regarded as a generous slaver and philanthropist,²⁴ yet there's no education for Nsia, enslaved in St Lucia, no books or paper, only umbrellas for Sundays.²⁵ Nsia gets the day off on Sunday and works in the garden or forages in the woods for plants to dye the rough woollen cloth with. It makes her feel a little bit more human if she can make her clothes her own and she helps process the harvest from the lace bark tree to embellish her dress and bonnet too.²⁶ Nsia loves Sunday's when she doesn't have to work on the plantation or be whipped and beaten²⁷ by the aggressive and cruel overseers, and she can eat her own yams and maize for supper.²⁸

Angharad and her family move into a cottage in town with the proceeds of the whole family's hard work. Life is better, they are no longer cold and hungry all the time. The working days are long and backbreaking, but they are able to benefit from the new factories in town. Her husband no longer has to take the arduous and dangerous journey to Shrewsbury, the cloth is taken by others to nearby Barmouth, or collected by traders. Her eldest son now trains as a fuller, he's a bright boy and this profession has a lot of status, Angharad is very proud.

²⁴ Thomas Phillips donated some 22500 books to St David's College Lampeter, known as the Thomas Phillips collection. Now part of the University of Wales Trinity St David. <https://www.uwtsd.ac.uk/rbla/a-z-list-of-collections/thomas-phillips-collection/>

²⁵ Thomas Phillips sets up a school for the poor boys of Wales, to enable them to access education, he donates thousands of books to the school and to Trinity College Lampeter. He allegedly pays for it, with the compensation he receives for the abolition of slavery. Thomas Phillips owned 167 slaves in 1834 and was compensated £4,737 8s 6d in 1837. <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/search/>

Phillips builds a college in Llandovery, it cost Phillips £4666 to build. A very similar amount to his compensation

²⁶ Lagetto lagetto's inner bark was harvested by the enslaved men and then processed by the women. Soaked and boiled, then pegged out to dry and bleach in the sun, and sometimes stained, it resembled lace and was used to embellish their clothes. <https://www.lindsaysekulowicz.com/1097-2/>

²⁷ The Amelioration Act was to be made in 1798 and introduced the concept of compensation for slaves that were treated cruelly. It was often ignored, even following the murder of slaves by white European owners

²⁸ Enslave people were given small acreages of rough land to grow their own produce
<https://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/archaeologyofslavery/slavery-caribbean>

Nsia has to work every day of her pregnancy, there is no let up, no grace for her condition. She fears for her unborn child and her own health. Women in the slave village support her as much as possible and help her during the birth. Her baby daughter is fine and she has to swaddle her and carry her on her back while working. Nsia is tired, exhausted and thinks of home, her mother, father, brothers and sisters, will they ever meet her daughter, will she ever see them again? Her big fat tears combine with dust of the over-worked soil and sting her eyes.

The years go by and Nsia has survived to old age, she has three children living and several grandchildren. Nsia has never seen her brother again and has accepted she will never see her family again, it's hard and the injustice of her life is unbearable for her to think about. They now get a cotton cloth to make their clothes from and it is easier to dye and shape and there's lots of it, no more rough woollen cloth. There's talk of slavery being abolished and Nsia hopes the future for her grandchildren will be brighter.

...

Yusoff explores the idea of how we can revisit history and references the Anthropocene as one that erases the history of race and that those histories can be found in the geology of time. This links directly to the ruins of the pandy's as being the only surviving and diminishing evidence of that time. Yusoff argues that there has been an over-statement of the white person in history and consequently the idea that to be human is to be white and slaves are for exploitation. The remains of the evidence of slave villages are rare in the Caribbean as the enslaved had so few possessions and therefore little to leave on site. The remains of 'Colonware' demonstrates the skills of firing pots, that the enslaved bought with them from Africa.

...

Angharad's family are being asked to do less and less work in the weaving factory. The merchant tells them there is not so much demand for the cloth anymore. They can no longer afford their rent and move in with two other families, food is scarce once again. They see the pandys and factories closing one by one. Eventually they are threatened with eviction and decide to head south, there's talk of plenty of work in the potteries and coal mines. They must go away from their home to survive and leave behind the trappings of this industry to become part of another.

...

In their book 'The History of the World in Seven Cheap Things' Patel and Moore introduce the idea of the 'Capitalocene' and refer to the plummet in cotton prices with the use of slave labour and how repeated uses of slave and cheap labour has destroyed nature in pursuit of profit for a small number of people. We can reflect here on the industrialisation of mid- Wales and the subsequent links to the industrialisation of south-Wales following the collapse of the web industry. The area of Dolgellau today is viewed as a rural idyll with a quaint and picturesque town and the south of Wales as the industrialised wasteland. The historian Chris Evans says 'To look at upland parishes of Montgomeryshire is not to see an unspoilt rural landscape but in fact a de-industrialised wasteland' (Evans, C. pg.3)

...

Slavery is abolished in 1833 and Nsia's grandchildren are not yet freed but become apprentices. They will serve up to another six years for their masters, this time poorly paid but still treated badly. In 1838 apprenticeships are banned too.²⁹

...

'When is it clear the old life is over, a new one has begun, and there is no looking back?'

Saidiya Hartman, Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route

...

Malik (2023) and Harding (2022) write about white people's responsibility to the legacy of slavery. It was mostly white people that bought, sold and enslaved black people to produce goods and commodities for trade and create vast profits for countries like Britain. It was mostly English people in Britain, but not all. Harding describes 'white guilt', this is not where this project is coming from, but an interest in the re-visiting of history, how accounts of Welsh history, especially the weaving narrative, excludes any history or accountability for involvement in slavery and the trans-Atlantic trade. How oppression manifests in several forms in this narrative. The Welsh weavers of 'negro cloth' were themselves paupers when they started to diversify into making cloth, to pay the increase in rents. They ventured into what was to become the start of industrialisation and were

²⁹ Between 1809 and 1869 the Navy seized over 1,600 slave ships and freed about 150,000 Africans.
<https://historicengland.org.uk/research/inclusive-heritage/the-slave-trade-and-abolition/sites-of-memory/ending-slavery/1834-the-end-of-slavery/>

able to benefit, unlike the enslaved, from this situation. However, by the late 1830's mid-Wales, once again, recorded some of the highest levels of poverty in Britain. The cyclical nature of labour and the plight of the enslaved and poor can be depicted in one tale where systemic oppression is about where you are born in a system – fortune or misfortune? Race is a construct perpetuated to maintain profits, Williams (2022) links racism directly to economic exploitation and Malik (2023) would like us to stand against the politics of identity.

As Sealy (2019) suggests we need to develop 'counter hegemonic narratives' and this is echoed in the earlier work of Massey discussing the relations of power and the structure of space in society. She states 'you cannot have success in the first world without thinking of the poverty elsewhere, they are intrinsically linked' (Massey, 1989).

...

Research

My praxis is informed by research and analysis of a range of contemporary, interdisciplinary practice. The work of Laia Abril has had a marked influence on my praxis. Attending an online talk given by Abril on her project, *A History of Misogyny*, with her use of research and multi-platform storytelling, enabled me to start to verbalise my own praxis. Abril addresses issues and stories, using archival material, photography and video, that can make the viewer uneasy, my work often contains these elements.

Alys Tomlinson's work is based in research from an 'inquisitive nature' (Tomlinson, 2022). Tomlinson's self-confessed curiosity draws parallels to my own practice. She states that research will lead her into 'finding these stories that aren't so obvious – but aren't really out there in the mainstream.' (Tomlinson, 2022) I have spent hours researching slavery and looking at all aspects of Welsh involvement, eventually focussing in on the little-known production of cloth, to clothe the enslaved. This opened up a multi-disciplinary approach through research, site visits and building a network of connections. Tomlinson says, 'More recently I started going towards these research-based projects where I'll often spend months, sometimes years, researching my subjects very thoroughly, really trying to get an insight into their lives before I actually begin documenting them photographically.' I met with local historians in Dolgellau to explore the physical remains of the industry and walk the area with them, revealing greater insights.

My own practice has widened further in this project, increasing involvement in the subject, including making the cloth I have imagined from my research, walking the Aran valley in Dolgellau several times, taking images and rubbings from the remaining ruins, recording the erasure. Working collaboratively on the MA with a fine artist, Hew Fuller, both visually and through an ongoing dialogue, has expanded my practice. Benefitting from greater understanding of more fluid fine art practices and mark making. Being in the space and place in more diverse ways and subsequently bringing a performative element to my final exhibition.

Whilst researching the work of An-My Lê, there was a resonance with the landscape of Dolgellau and the traces of the industrialisation that were being swallowed by nature and time, alongside the

complexity of the story of negro cloth. The images for this project are meant to seem ambiguous. Why photograph this pile of old stones, what is this place? I want to intrigue the viewer and aim to echo Lê's practice 'to try to photograph landscape in such a way so that history could be suggested through the landscape.' Lê uses an 'old Deardorff wooden large format camera' to capture the detail in her images, 'every detail feels like it is a subject, every detail becomes significant.' (Ryan, 2023)

Installed on the site of a stopping off point for British slave trading ships, *Nkyinkyim Installation* by the Ghanaian sculptor Kwame Akoto-Bamfo, remembers the millions of Africans taken into slavery from the west coast. The carved heads, usually used on graves, have twisted expressions of fear and anguish. The installation also contains a sculpture of seven enslaved people chained and manacled to be taken on the horrific middle passage journey to the America's. The work captures the horror of enslavement and yet recognises the individuals within that dreadful time. The emotion of these pieces is very powerful and has informed parts of 'the story'. Akoto-Bamfo uses this definition of palimpsest on his website:

'a manuscript or piece of writing material on which the original writing has been effaced to make room for later writing but of which traces remain. Something reused or altered but still bearing visible traces of its earlier form.'

This is echoed by the story of the negro cloth production and how it has been overlooked and forgotten but we can still see traces of its 'earlier form' and involvement in the slave trade

The photographer Ursula Schulz-Dornburg uses maps, writing and images in her work and books, to portray a narrative and to explore all the layers of a landscape, cultural, political and historical. Schulz-Dornburg's work looks 'back at areas of past historical or political importance her images highlight how conflict, destruction, time and decay transforms the landscape.' I have introduced maps to my work with more confidence and archival images to highlight the erosion of the landscape. Through the exhibition catalogue, in the form of postcards, I have introduced text to the project in order to examine further the layers of the story.

Conclusion

The exhibition installation *A Tangled Web* will include three large scale, high resolution black and white photographs, taken with a deep depth of field to reveal the intricate detail in the ruins of the pandys and the landscape. Alongside these full-bleed images, will be two framed works, a found archival postcard and an historical map of the Dolgellau area. A three-yard length of rough cloth, woven on a loom over the past months, will be screen printed with a three-arrow triangle, commonly used to represent the trans-Atlantic slave and commerce route from Britain via west Africa and the 'middle passage' to the America's. During the opening evening of the exhibition, seated in front of the wall-mounted works, I will sit and slowly unpick the weft and the warp, a metaphorical performance of the complexity of the story.

This body of work, researching and exploring the areas around the ruins of the pandys and the people that lived and are living in the landscape, identifies and investigates the area's political and social situation. The reclaimed countryside of Dolgellau and it's surrounds are now portrayed as a romantic notion of Welsh countryside, unfettered by the exploitation of industry. This belies the history of the area and highlights how 'time and decay', geology, the Anthropocene and Capitalocene have altered the landscape, erasing historical events.

We also see that poverty is part of this story and how 1980's reasoning that you were poor because of "personal defect" has been a thread through time past and present. The politics of individualisation (it's your own fault) and identity has eroded the concept of class and the concepts of institutional racism and societal inequalities. Diversity has replaced the aim of a more equal society and as Malik says 'a diversified elite is not made any the less elite by its diversity.' The wealth of the country still sits with 10% of the population and much of it was made from trans-Atlantic slavery.

Artists Images



Fig. 1

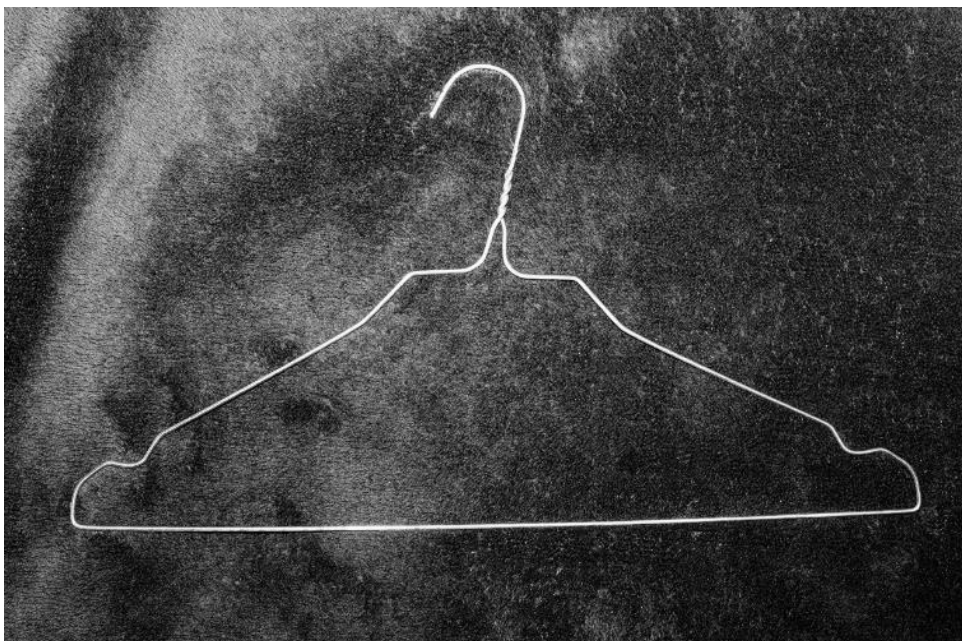


Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Fig. 7



Fig 8.

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