

BA Photography in The Arts: Contextual Practices

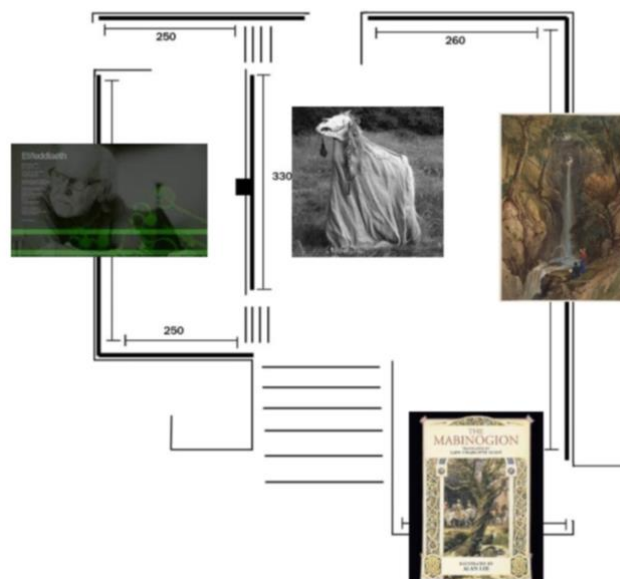
Ways of Perceiving (ADAD4019)

Essay: Imagined Exhibition

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Etifeddiaeth

elysiumgallery



In this exhibition I shall present a series of art works to represent the heritage of Wales and the Welsh culture. The reason for this is, as a Welsh man, I believe strongly in our nation and our pride. I would like to signify and symbolise the importance of our heritage and independence through artworks, connecting them to changes in society/functionalism that shaped Wales over history. Most importantly conveying how we must act to keep our language and culture alive. The exhibit will have a direct link to a Welsh poem that's featured in the show to confront my statements. This exhibition is being held in Elysium gallery Swansea as it's layout presents the artworks connectivity to each other as well as the underlying message of the importance of sustaining our culture and its history.

Wales is a country with a history of oppression, for instance Wales has had many social and cultural shifts in its past, this is due to the nature and habit of society many years ago. Between 1030 and 1300 Wales had a population explosion where its numbers doubled. Wales's social structure only truly became united through the battle of independence in the year 1400 with the last true prince of Wales Owain Glyndwr who fought against Edward the 1st and his English Army. The Welsh rebellion failed after the death of Glyndwr in 1415¹, and for a while Wales was under the jurisdiction of English law as a result of being annexed to England, leading to a infringement of Welsh culture and its people. It did not bring the culture to its end, stories, traditions music, scriptures and language lived on through the people of Wales many of which are presented through My exhibition.



As you enter Elysium, you are welcomed and greeted with Mari Lwyd located in the centre/doorway to the exhibition. A Welsh tradition that has become very rare in recent years, thought to have originated from Celtic Mythology, the pale horse is thought to be able to pass to the underworld. This event is orchestrated by a group of people from the local area that create a costume out of a white sheet, metal pole, glass eyes, ribbons / decorations accompanied with a horse skull. The “Mari Lwyd” symbolises great luck through the harsh Welsh winter months to New year. The Mari Lwyd would try and gain entry to houses via song, the merry men would explain why they needed to enter, and the occupant of the house would sing why they can't be let in. This would go back and forth until the occupant didn't have any more reasons to not let them in. When leaving the Mari Lwyd would wish everyone a happy new year. To see the Mari Lwyd approaching a home, Inn or pub is to be seen already as good luck, but as time has passed it has almost died out completely.

The reason for this inclusion is to revisit a Welsh tradition that has co-existed and survived many cultural shifts up until modern day where it is now receding. This can be summarised alongside other Welsh traditions by a quote from the book how traditions live and die², “what I really value about cultural traditions, they reveal traditions in their most characteristic shape: the shape that survives the passing of

¹ (The battle for Welsh Independence book, David Moore, 2007, page: introduction)

² (How traditions live and die, Oliver Morin, 2011, page 1)

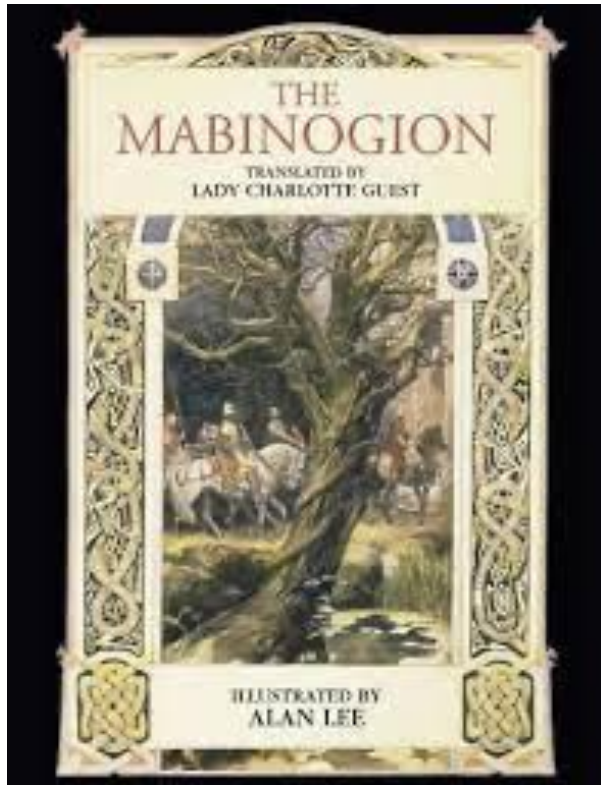
generations, that proves resilient to social contexts changing.” We know this because our view of culture on its own scale and in this circumstance “Mari lwyd” a scale beyond the short time frame of human lives, where it sits within story, tale and song is spoken read and valued as a connection to its people.

Hence why the importance of this being the very first thing seen in the exhibition allows the audience to acknowledge and value its presence and interaction.



Placed on the wall to the left as you move toward to the exhibit, this water colour art piece (16.5 x 23.4 inches-A2) by artist Jackson Samuel was of Devil's Bridge. Legend says that the bridge was built by the Devil as it was too difficult for mortal people to build. The Devil built the bridge in return for the soul of the first life to cross the bridge, but the Devil was tricked by an old woman who threw bread onto the bridge and her dog followed, thus becoming the first life to cross the new bridge. This is a real place in Pontarfynnach that is one of Wales' famous landmarks, for this very tale. This is one of the remaining landmarks in Wales that has seen history play out before it for many years and has held a history of its own. From putting Wales on the map to creating stories and myth for Welsh children to be told for generations. To explain my thought process behind this art piece and its contribution I must use a quote from philosopher Thomas Harrison. He summarises the significance of a bridge: “humans have tied a place of origin to a place of destination. Here we show

to be creatures who cannot unite with separating”³ This quote symbolises that the bridge and its tale is tied to its origins but as society changes it has endured especially to many modern functionalist needs and institutions⁴. Highlighting how its been built upon three times to meet modern needs. As well as this how the tale originating from the Mabanogi (Welsh myths and tales) which leads into the next exhibit.



Placed on a plinth allowing the viewer to read is: Y Mabinogion a book that has been debated to be written between the 10th and 12th century. The tales of storytellers, bards and writers of the time, these tales within the book contain myths and legends of Welsh folklore and have many connections to real world places or landmarks. This book highlights language, culture and song which led to inspire the likes of famous authors such as J.R.R Tolkien and Alan Garner.

The four mabinogi tales, from which the Mabinogion takes its name, are thought to be the earliest dating from the 11th century, full of legends and myths that spread across Wales. Five of the remaining stories involve the legend of Arthur and his knights which includes one of the earliest references to the Grail legend. Arthur's Court is the setting in The Dream of Rhonabwy, which tells of a story involving Arthur and his knights, fairy heroes and Celtic warriors.

The importance of this book is not only one of culture but one of language, this book contains songs and stories that Welsh children grew up with, even in present day some legends are taught in Welsh within schools. The Welsh language In 2021, an

³ (Of Bridges, Thomas Harrison, 2021, page: 6)

⁴ Emile Durkheim's functionalist theory on social change - within new institutions will emerge new needs: (The division of labor in society, Emile Durkheim, 1893)

estimated 538,000 usual residents in Wales aged three years and over (17.8%) reported being able to speak Welsh, which is a decrease since 2011 (562,000, 19.0%)⁵. Folklore allows the mind to wonder and explore the creative wisdom of a tale⁶, both the language and tales give each other purpose to be spoken. Although the tales are not a factual part of history, as said in the theory book Folklore concepts: "For that matter, folklore does not defy definition, but simply does not need one. Its meaning appears lucid beyond clarification, perspicuous beyond explanation"⁷, adding to how it is a part of our history's contribution to language, literature and song etc.

Cymraeg	English
Cawsom wlad i'w chadw, darn o dir yn dyst ein bod wedi mynnu byw. Cawsom genedl o genhedlaeth i genhedlaeth ac anadlu ein hanes ni ein hunain. A chawsom iaith, er na cheisiem hi, oherwydd ei hias oedd yn y pridd eisoes a'i grym anniddig ar y mynyddoedd. Troesom ein tir yn simneiau tân a phlannu coed a pheilonau cadarn lle nad oedd llyn. Troesom ein cenedl i genhedlu estroniaid heb ystyr i'w hanes, gwymon o ddynion heb ddal tro'r trai. A throesom iaith yr oesau yn iaith ein cywilydd ni. Ystyriwch; a oes dihareb a ddwed y gwirionedd hwn: Gwerth cynnydd yw gwarth cenedl a'i heddw yw ei hangau hi. - Gerallt Lloyd Owen	We got a country to keep, a piece of land is a witness that we insisted on living. We had a nation of generations to generation and breathing our own history. And we got a language, even though we didn't seek it, because of its heat that was already in the soil and its restless power on the mountains. We turned our land into fire chimneys and plant trees and sturdy pylons where there was no lake. We turned our nation to procreation aliens without meaning to their history, seaweed of men without catching turn of the tide And we turned the language of the ages in the language of our shame. - Gerallt Lloyd Owen

My final inclusion to this exhibition is a poem, by Gerallt Lloyd Owen. I would like this to stand out in the gallery as it is one of the more deeper and powerful art pieces as it will be played in the screen room in Elysium separated from the other artworks

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<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/language/bulletins/welshlanguagewales/census2021>

⁶ <https://www.farmersalmanac.com/importance-folklore-modern-world>

⁷ (Folklore concepts, Henry Glassie, 2020, Page 64)

https://www.google.co.uk/books/edition/Folklore_Concepts/rtXrDwAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1

where the poem will be projected onto a video with audio from the author reading aloud this is to allow the viewer to stand and listen to what is said and whether the viewer speaks Welsh or not, it would not matter as there will be a physical English copy to go alongside the exhibit.

The poem possesses a powerful message towards Welsh people and our duty, as it signifies the loss of culture throughout our Welsh History and although we have our land and spoken tongue, it is not as it was, and we have lost our way to procreation. Harold carter's Welsh culture theory summarises this easily: "Language is a prime component in defining identity"⁸.

This to me will give a new meaning to how the reader portrays all other exhibits and whether they have a similar history, but mostly how to act to conserve it. The Author himself gives an outstanding reading of his poem with each word spoken with power, as he speaks to his people and his country in native tongue, again adding to importance of language.⁹

From the drowned town of Tryweryn to the effects of the Welsh knot, Wales has been inflicted by subjugation on many accounts in history. But our heritage prevailed in many ways such as the creativity in song, literature, art, tradition, language and much more. I hope to have showcased in this exhibition titled Etifeddiaeth (inheritance) the beautiful nature of Welsh heritage and accentuate the significance to Welsh people of the obligation to preserve our culture to ensure that it does not face oppression again.

Bibliography

1. (The battle for Welsh Independence book, David Moore, 2007, page: introduction)
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 8. (Welsh culture, Harold Carter, 2020, Page 18)
 9. (Etifeddiaeth, Gerallt Lloyd Owen, 2005) YouTube clip of the author reading aloud-[url](#)
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⁸ (Welsh culture, Harold Carter, 2020, Page 18)

⁹ Etifeddiaeth YouTube clip of the author reading aloud-[url](#)