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I confirm that I have not presented any AI generated materials
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Title: Who am I?

Abstract

This essay will analyse my body of work to establish my identity as a mature artist. Using three keywords to probe the question of artistic identity. What do the three keywords mean to me, and the reasons why? They will be supported by artists that best illustrate these influences and examples of their work, such as Sir John Kyffin Williams, David Nash and Grayson Perry. The thinkers who provide the theory in practice and are shaping views on art such as the Welsh writer Raymond Williams and James Bridle. Overall, it is an investigation into how to communicate visually, raising awareness of the impact on the environment in the face of global warming and achieving an artistic identity.

Introduction

This piece of written work explores my motivations as an artist, where they come from, my experiences and identifies a question that sums up this journey. To find the key motivations behind my artwork, I brainstormed my current artwork, which led me to establish patterns and themes within my work. This is a journey into myself, and even at these preliminary stages, I am discovering things about my identity and work that I had not considered before. I discovered the three words by speaking to colleagues and conducting a critical examination of my art making process and brainstorming the words that provide the best explanation. The result of this process is the three key words of Hiraeth, Nature and Identity, which best describe my deepest thoughts and motivations within my art practice.

Hiraeth

This means “Originally, and chiefly in the context of Wales and Welsh culture: deep longing for a person or thing which is absent or lost; yearning; nostalgia” (Oxford University Press, 2025, para.1).

For me, this means a sense of belonging not just to the country but also to a time when I was young and things were simpler. It is a time that has been romanticised and embellished over time and really may never have existed as I remember. My identity lies in these family roots. The artists who connect to this meaning, why they connect to this meaning and what this means to my identity.

The artist who connects me to this time and place is John Kyffin Williams. He paints landscapes that remind me of my youth, growing up and living next to a farm, wandering the Welsh hills and woods in all weather and occasionally being chased by the farmer, his sheepdogs and livestock. His pictures often depict the landscape and the working people of northwest Wales. Despite often being critical of the contemporary art world, Williams has become the figurehead of art in Wales (Roderick, 2014). His pictures emphasise the continual importance of landscape in Welsh visual culture, so much so that his mountain landscapes, such as figure 1, *Farmers on the Carneddau* have an almost symbolic quality indicating Wales and Welshness (Roderick, 2014).



Fig 1. *Farmers on the Carneddau*, (Williams, 1980)

Williams' depiction of farmers roaming the Welsh landscape creates an understanding of rural life within the Welsh community. The image depicts the harshness of the Welsh landscape using colour and, as a working environment, intrinsically links Welsh identity with Welsh culture. The Welsh writer Raymond Williams contested the widely held belief that culture could be reduced to a set of artefacts by adopting a more social definition, insisting that culture is not only a body of intellectual and imaginative work but also essentially a whole way of life. Welsh culture is often socially defined by the lifestyle led by an individual through their labours, as shown in Figure 1 (Wyatt, 2018).

My experiences living and working in Wales link me to this life. I have experienced the demanding work of industry in the valleys, the trade unions, the social aspects of playing rugby, and the inevitable hard drinking lifestyle of the long dead social clubs. These experiences contrast with thirty years of policing in the Welsh capital and rural areas in South Wales. It is these experiences that have shaped me.

My sense of Hiraeth comes from direct exposure to various stimuli, including cultural theory, cultural history, television, the press and radio (Wyatt, 2018). This theory is echoed by the words of Raymond Williams in his book on *Culture and Society* he writes that:

Every human society has its own shape, its own purposes, its own meanings. Every human society expresses these, in institutions, and in arts and learning. The making of a society is the finding of common meanings and directions, and its growth is an active debate and amendment under the pressures of experience, contact, and discovery, writing themselves into the land (Williams 2014, p.2).

What I believe Williams is discussing is that my sense of Hiraeth comes not just from my nationality, being born in Wales, but from an amalgamation of experiences over a lifetime. This begins before I was born, with my family's place in Welsh history, orally passed down to me over the dinner table and to my experiences and interactions growing up over the years and the absorption of these influences which have shaped my thinking and identity.

Nature

What I understand nature to mean to me is that sense of being out in the open fresh air, exposed to the elements, the calmness and violence that it brings in the blink of an eye and the feeling of being a small part of a bigger timeless thing. This is what I feel when I am away from people out walking along the coastline and forestry of Wales. This connection gives me time to breathe, think and recover, a pause from the self-induced chains of modern-day connectivity.

This ecotherapy is an umbrella term for various health-supporting activities that engage the natural environment and are focused on stress reduction and a host of other health benefits along with an improvement in general wellbeing. Forest therapy provides health benefits regardless of gender and age and seems to be an excellent way to get well after mental exhaustion (Simonienko, Murawiec and Tryjanowski, 2023).

This connection to nature was severed for over two years when a stroke greatly affected my abilities to think and move. At this time, I was either housebound or confined to short, accompanied walks in residential areas. I did not realise how important this connection to nature was to me because I had always taken it for granted. I had been undergoing regular doses of ecotherapy for years without even knowing it.

My main source of inspiration comes from my presence in nature. For me, this means expeditions out into the Welsh countryside, observing, experiencing the seasons, sketching and obtaining reference photographs. Reflecting on this inspiration, it has been there all my life, from growing up as a child in the countryside to a lifetime of running, cycling and swimming in the wilds.

There is only nature, in all its eternal flowering, creating microprocessors and data centers and satellites just as it produced oceans, trees, magpies, oil and us. Nature is imagination itself. Let us not re-imagine it, then, but begin to imagine a new, with nature as our co-conspirator: our partner, our comrade and our guide (Bridle, 2023).

In the audiobook, narrated by the author James Bridle, he talks about nature with a new set of eyes, not as something of the past but as a source of unexplored knowledge to lead us into the future (Bridle, 2023). This book has helped me to reevaluate my surroundings and how nature has influenced my life and artwork. The result of this revelation is that I have begun to rethink how I will use nature in the future. This does not mean that I will not paint and draw, as drawing and painting from nature is an important part of my process. What it means is that I have added another facet to my work, environmental art, because working with the land and using natural materials to sculpt in the environment is revolutionary to me.

Environmental art and its use of nature is something I began to research and question at the beginning of this course. I realised that I depend on nature to invigorate, revive and inspire my creativity for my work. It has also given me fresh eyes and the confidence to research land artists such as Smithson and Goldsworthy, to name just a few.

Inspiration in this field of work has come from a more contemporary direction, such as David Nash's *Ash Dome* (see figure 2) and Andy Goldsworthy's new project *Hanging Stones* (see figure 3). They create works that are natural, fleeting in existence and at the mercy of the elements. These artists confront the difficult questions of sustainability and environmental impact with their art and practice.

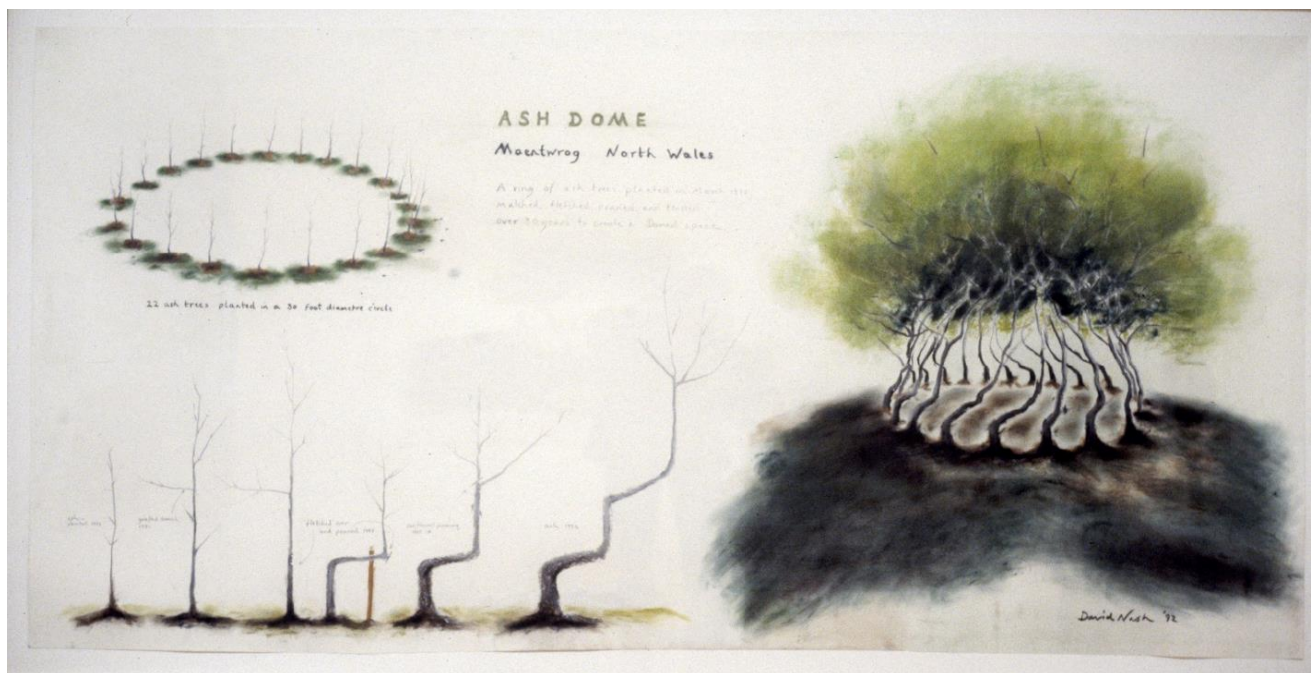


Fig 2. *Ash Dome* (Nash, 1992).



Fig 3. *Hanging Stones Project* (Goldsworthy, 2025).

Hanging Stones, seen in figure 3, is an ongoing project by Andy Goldsworthy in the North York Moors. Conceived by Goldsworthy as a single artwork, consisting of nine existing buildings in varying states of disrepair, which have been rebuilt as artworks and connected by a six-mile walk. The walk between each building is as much a part of the artwork as the buildings themselves (Goldsworthy, 2025).

I am now just starting to experiment with the theories and challenges presented by creating sustainable environmental artwork. Currently, I am researching and developing ideas for such a project in Penllegaer Country Park, Swansea, which aims to produce interactive

sculptures to be placed around the park made from sustainable materials, preferably sourced from within the park itself.

The idea of the gallery space subtracts from the artwork all the clues that interfere with the fact that it is “art”. The work is isolated from everything that would detract from its own evaluation of itself (O’Doherty and McEvilley, 1999). The idea of incorporating sustainable art into nature at the mercy of time and the elements is exciting and a fresh breath of air to me. It challenges the concepts of the idea of the museum and what and where art should be.

Identity

To progress as an artist, I need a definition for identity that I can apply to my circumstances. I have already discounted any definitions that seek to question my gender identity, as these are not relevant. The Collins Dictionary defines identity as:

A person's name and other facts about who they are or the fact of being, or feeling that you are, a particular type of person, organisation, etc.; the qualities that make a person, organisation, etc. different from others (Cambridge University Press & Assessment, 2025, para.2).

In my opinion, this dictionary definition is too loose and general to help explore this subject. Investigating the modern theory of identity reduces it to two factors. Subjective identity is what you conceive yourself to be, and objective identity is how you might be viewed independently of how you see yourself. In other words, your objective identity is who you are considering certain biological or social facts about you (Bilgram, 2006). The subjective and objective definitions are more helpful in my quest to establish my artistic identity.

In a recent experiment to produce an abstract painting (see figure 4), I covered a canvas with random marks over several weeks. Reviewing this experiment, I concluded that, as the painting progressed, several biased decisions were made on how marks and their colour were applied to the canvas. Unknowingly, control was exerted by ordering the marks in a geometric pattern, lines at ninety-degree angles, on the canvas.

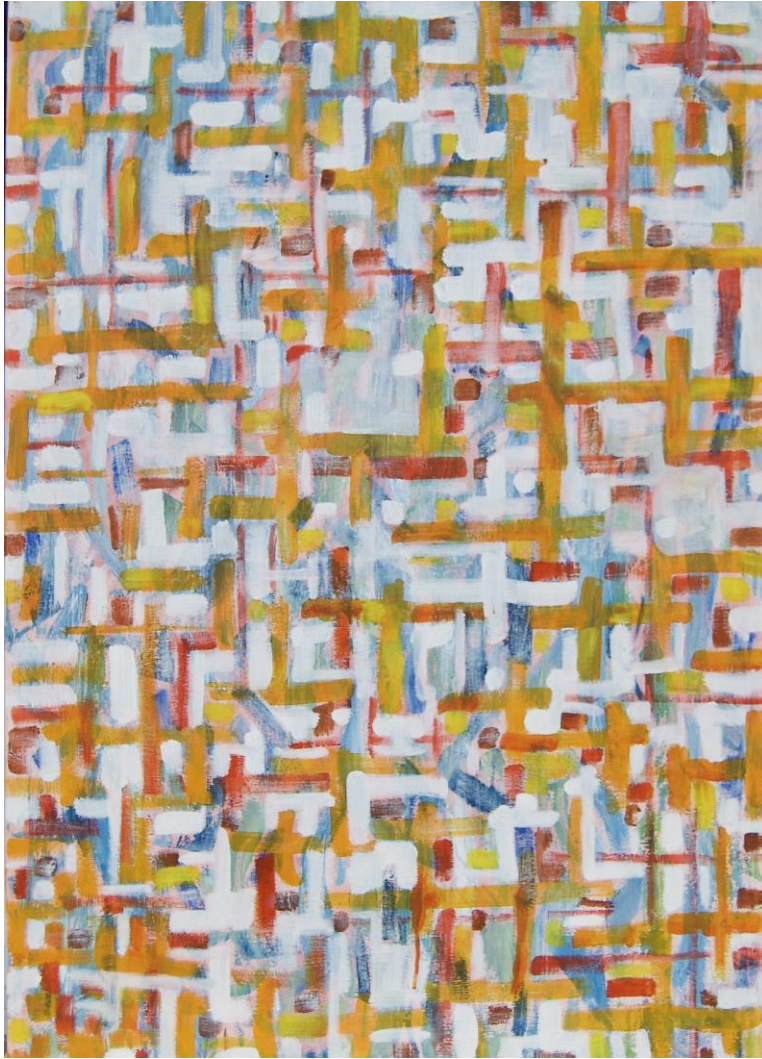


Fig 4. *Monday* (Bassett, 2025)

In a group critique, my colleagues gave positive feedback about the artwork and how it differed from previous work. I could only describe the work as an Excel spreadsheet. I had subconsciously turned the painting into a representation of a spreadsheet, which I had used daily in my previous employment. Subconsciously, I was bridging the old me, the fact-based investigator and a need for order, with the new me, the expressive artist.

The closest description to my past identity I have read is Default Man, a person who embodies neutrality but is not truly neutral. They prioritise rational goals like profit, efficiency, self-determination and ambition over emotional rewards like social cohesion, quality of life, culture and happiness (Perry, 2017).

I do not relate to the rational goals of default man mainly because I do not recognise these qualities in my personality (Perry, 2017). However, Default man's neutrality is a position that I can identify with. Perry is alluding to the fact that this is not true naturality but a perceived neutrality. I agree and try to maintain this same position now by habit. This position does not suggest that I am neutral: I have an opinion, however, I do not voice my opinions through my artwork as others can. Expressing my opinion and position through my work on a subject affects my neutrality, which is a struggle to achieve. This may be an after effect of my previous employment, past experiences and biases.



Fig 5. *Portrait of Sir Grayson Perry* (Adapted from Ansett, 2013. *Portrait of Sir Grayson Perry*).

As a middle-aged man, Perry is a contradiction to the Default man. Over the years he has battled with his identity, formed a bond with Alun Measles his teddy bear, formed an alter ego in Claire and publicly come out in the world as a transvestite (see figure 4) whilst being married, having children and enjoying the manly pursuits of motorcycling and cycling. Perry uses his life experiences to inform and shape his identity as an artist. (Perry and Jones, 2007).

What can be learned from Perry is that subjectively, he has discovered his identity over a lifetime and crossed a number of personal barriers along the way. This identity has fused with his objective identity, with his personal life being revealed and informing his artwork.

Considering these two explanations separately may help me establish a basis for my artistic identity. Subjectively, if the experiment has taught me anything, it is that I like to put things in order, which harks back to previous experiences. These skills have been built over thirty years of working in various careers. This makes me feel like an outsider in the art world, which is full of younger artists. Objectively, I struggle with my outward identity as an artist due to this institutionally ingrained neutrality. What I am realising is that this is something that will not happen overnight and may take some time.

Conclusion

I have seen other guest artists give lectures and bare their souls in revealing their work has only left them with deeper questions and an ongoing search for what they consider to be their truth; at the same time, they are satisfied with the explanation of their artwork and its deepening, evolving questions. I have conducted a similar quest to discover my sense of being as an artist and its deeper meaning.

Comparing artists such as Williams, Goldsworthy and Perry is unusual; they are artists from different disciplines at separate ends of a scale, but they all share an established identity in their chosen field. This is what I am attempting to find, but in my own way.

This examination after a lifetime of working is difficult. It is about the investigation into the qualities and years of experience that have made me what I am today and how I access these past experiences to create my future artistic identity.

The engagement with the three topics has led me to discover a lot about my artwork. How I establish an artistic identity that includes my past experiences of life is considered as a question for further exploration within the independent research document, under my working question for next year.

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