

Wakelin Award 2015 Alex Duncan: *like swimming*



Alex Duncan *like swimming* (detail) 2015
Installation at Swansea Grand Theatre © photo. Eva Bartussek

It was with great pleasure that I accepted the invitation by the Friends of the Glynn Vivian Art Gallery to select the recipient of the Wakelin Award 2015. The award has, since its inception 17 years ago, provided a means for the Glynn Vivian to acquire the work of contemporary artists not yet represented within the gallery's collection. This augmentation, if carefully considered, can provide a significant body of work which allows flexibility and context for future curation and audience.

After an initial long list, I provided a short list for the Friends' committee to consider - a list of emerging artists who I believe in their different approaches will continue to make works contributing to the visual arts in Wales and beyond. After some debate it was unanimously agreed that Alexander Duncan should be this year's Wakelin Award recipient.

Swansea-born, Alex graduated from Swansea Metropolitan University (now Swansea College of Art at UWTSU) in 2007 and subsequently followed this through by gaining his Masters degree from the Royal College of Art in London this year.

I had the privilege of teaching Alex on the Fine Art course in Swansea and have enjoyed watching his development as an artist over the years. His commitment to his craft has been evident from his student days.

Alex is a contemporary sculptor. He grapples with the materiality of objects, enjoying the physicality of things and their semantic language. For Alex, there is no such thing as the 'innocent' object devoid of meaning. For him, objects happened-upon become events of heightened perception or

narrative. Like many artists before him, walking is part of Alex's process and action. To be out there within landscape - rural, windswept and sea-focused at home in Wales - urban, cacophonous and eclectic in his new home, London - is to both be alive and conscious of his surrounding world and his relationship with it. Picking through the detritus, both man-made residues and organic phenomena that he finds beneath his feet, he has a rare talent as he selects and re-presents. He is conscious of the changing and vulnerable environment. It's a little like reading Roland Barthes for the first time. It takes a certain flair to make us fully understand that which we thought we recognised but that only now, through his installations, do we understand.

Cove (2010) was an important early piece that revealed the thought processes of Alex which remain in his current work. It's a re-presentation of a collected (over several years) mass of pebble forms. These forms though are not what they seem. They are the unpalatable waste from a toxic plastic industry that, dumped in the sea, have been refashioned by the natural forces of wind and sea into the appearance of their surroundings when found. This simulacrum conveys both the seduction of beauty and the terror of pollution in one hit.

On a visit to his London studio early this year (still surreptitiously!), I saw leaning against the wall familiar objects - floats, the kind that we use to learn to swim, ubiquitous at swimming pools. I thought initially that Alex had moved towards the 'ready-made'. They were all leaning, electric blues and yellows, not classically beautiful but functional and free. They'd obviously been around

a bit, scratched, frayed and bitten, crumbling and well-used. 'How many bodies had learned to swim, been kept afloat by these small wonders?' I thought, bending down to pick one up, to move it easily from here to there, to feel its lightness.

On touch, I realised that these objects were of a solid and weighty mass, appearing as light things. On realisation, I recoiled and they were light again. These objects became the Wakelin award-winning work *like swimming* (2015).

Alex makes the ordinary extraordinary, forcing the audience to re-consider and re-imagine implications; *like swimming* is both humorous and serious. The floats' inferred jollity and life-saving raison d'être, by recasting and re-presentation, remind us of our vulnerability and dependence upon the narrative of learning and commitment, but also of our relationship to nature, its beauty, the wonder of it, its danger, its history and its presence.

The installation of *like swimming* at the Grand Theatre was beautifully realised and complemented by other works including *wavy gravy* (2015), a found and reworked video piece of multiple figures in a Japanese swimming pool. Here again, the proximity of something fun and something ominous occurs. Alex has kindly gifted a copy of this video piece to the Glynn Vivian and both pieces will become a significant addition to an already fine and varied Wakelin Award-enriched collection.

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Chair's Letter

Annwyl Gyfeillion / Dear Friends

As you know, we expect the Glynn Vivian to reopen its doors to the public in autumn 2016. It will be a major event, for the Gallery, for the City and the whole region, and will begin a new chapter in the Glynn Viv's distinguished history. For us, the Friends, resumed access to the building will be a particular pleasure, and an opportunity to redouble our efforts to support the Gallery, at a time of real difficulty and hardship for the local authority, its main funder.

Many bodies have contributed to the 'new' Glynn Viv: the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Arts Council of Wales, the Welsh Government, City & County of Swansea and others. In order to give the reopened Gallery the very best possible start, the Committee of the Friends has decided to launch a campaign appeal to raise additional funds. We have jointly established a Fundraising team with members of the Glynn Vivian staff to carry this out.

We plan to fund three areas for which money is still needed: education facilities and equipment, conservation of collections, especially the Richard Glynn Vivian collection, and promoting and publicising the Gallery. From 1 March 2016 we shall be inviting Friends and friends – members and sympathetic non-members – to make donations to the fund. Our aim will be to hand over £50,000 to the Gallery by the time the building reopens.

I do hope you'll be willing to help this excellent cause to the best of your ability. We'll be writing to you nearer the time with more details about the objects of the campaign and how to help. In the meantime we'd be very pleased to hear from you about it, and even more pleased if you were able to help!

To cap a dreadful year for the loss of prominent local artists we heard at the end of September about the death of the painter Valerie Ganz, whose works, especially those taking coalminers, prisoners and dancers as their themes, will be familiar to most of you. Valerie was a member of the Friends and will be badly missed by all. An obituary will follow in the Spring Newsletter.

Gan ddymino'n dda ichi ar gyfer Nadolig llawen a Blwyddyn Newydd dda
With best wishes to you all for a happy Christmas and New Year

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andrewmwgreen@btinternet.com

Friends News

New Members

We would like to give a warm and friendly welcome to new members: Mr Richard Nash and Steve Hale from The Graig, Burry Port; Mr and Mrs Chris and Morwenna Talfan-Davies from Uplands, Swansea; Ms Victoria Vernon-Hunt from Llangennith, Swansea. We are also about to welcome a new member from Australia, Patricia McDonald who is a descendant of Richard Glynn Vivian's brother. We look forward to a lasting Friendship.

Ex Members

Professor Farley-Hills is no longer able to attend our events and has decided not to renew his membership. We thank him for his long support of the Friends and for his kind donation to help continue our work. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Marilyn Caruana, an active member of the Friends, for her kind donation towards the Friends.

Renewal of Membership

Last year a dozen or so Friends did not renew: the reasons are numerous, including instructions lost by banks or members leaving the area.

Also we still have some members who have not updated their standing orders to cover the increase in subscription fees and are therefore under-paying for their Friends membership. Would you please check that your standing orders reflect the correct amount of £15 for Single Membership and £20 Double Membership.

Equally we have a number of Friends this year, 2015-2016, who have not renewed their membership yet, and we strongly urge you to do so, especially as the Gallery will be re-opening in 2016 and we have an exciting programme planned. If you do not wish to renew please contact me, details below, and I will remove you from our email database and our mailing list.

Ex Friends

We have to report the sad loss of artist, Valerie Ganz, a long-time member and supporter of the Friends. An obituary of Valerie will be included in the Spring Newsletter.

Mrs Jean Jennings, a Life Member of the Friends has also sadly passed away.

Art Fund Cards

The corporate membership fee for the Art Fund has increased considerably and the committee decided not to renew this year. We urge members to join individually as there are many benefits.

<http://www.artfund.org/get-involved/buy-a-national-art-pass>

Dates for Diaries

We have an upcoming Social Event on Tuesday, 15th December, *an Art Quiz with Friends*, and we'll be serving a glass of wine and tapas, pintxos, canapes, nibbles, call them what you will. It should be a fun evening, starting at 6.30 pm to be held at 64 Eaton Crescent, Swansea SA1 4QN, tickets will be £5. Please contact Judy Barnes h.a.barnes@btinternet.com or telephone 01792 476187 to reserve your place. All you need to bring is your knowledge and good cheer.

Should you lose the Friends Events Leaflet you can download a copy from our website

<http://www.friendsoftheglynnvivian.com/downloads/eventsprogramme.pdf>

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“The Force” Paintings of Ceri Richards: 1943-45

This article revisits a set of three interconnected paintings which Ceri Richards produced during World War Two. They have been described as the “force” paintings because their immediate inspiration stemmed from Dylan Thomas’ explosively titled poem “The force that through the green fuse” which was written in Swansea in 1933 and published in *Eighteen Poems* in 1934.

Various individuals have referred to and discussed the links between these images and Thomas’ great, inter-war poem starting with the artist himself and continuing with, perhaps most notably, the art historian Mel Gooding. In his monograph *Ceri Richards* (Cameron and Hollis 2002), Gooding quotes from the artist’s wartime lecture given in Cardiff in 1940:

“... We find in some examples of creative work a quality of strength which is partly present because the artist expresses a strong resentment to a state of affairs which brings such chaos and waste ... it is symptomatic of creative work too that it can be stimulated by disturbances and can produce vigorous work within this disturbance.” (p.55)

Richards continues, alluding to the Surrealists who, he said, realised that: “... this destructive spirit [of war] was a temporary one – that it couldn’t remain for ever and constantly destructive – that at some point it would be transformed into something constructive – making some real contribution to culture.” (Ibid, pp.55-6)

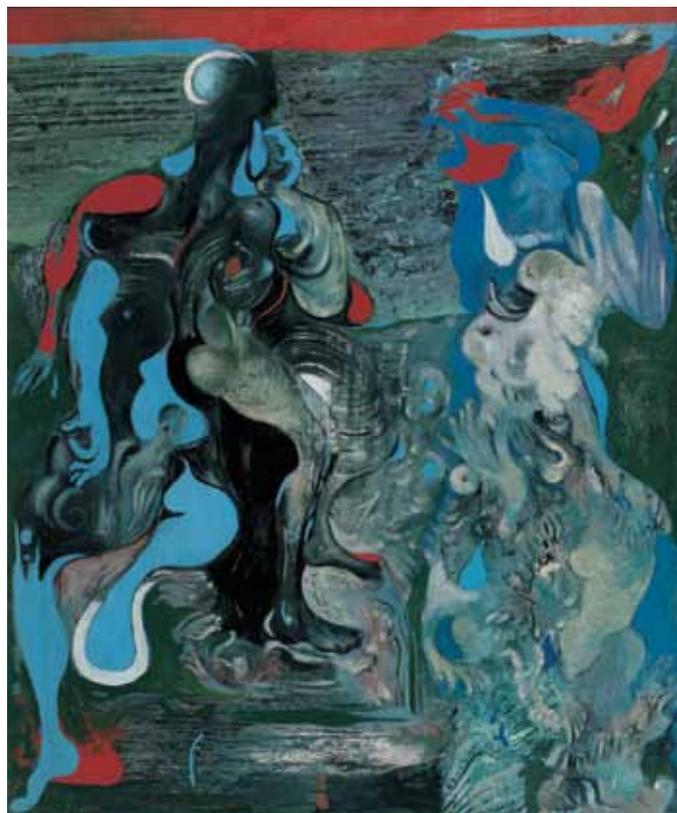
A re-examination in 2015 of Richards’ images reveals not only the established importance of modernist art but also the unrecognised role of earlier art and thought. The three visionary and metaphorical pictures are: *The force that drives the water through the rocks* (1943-44); *Cycle of Nature* (1944); *The force that through the green fuse: The Source* (1945). What strikes one about them is Richards’ (and Dylan’s) sense of process, the cyclical, the interrelatedness of things and a fascination with water as a penetrative, life-giving and destructive force.

These qualities were also important to Leonardo da Vinci, especially those of water, as indicated by Kenneth Clark: “For all of Leonardo’s interests the most continuous and obsessive was the movement of water ... his studies of swirling water ... taking the form of both hair and flowers, racing along in twisted strands, ... mak[ing] ... little whirlpools, like a cluster of ferns with long curling tendrils.” (Kenneth Clark, *Leonardo da Vinci* (first published 1939) Penguin 1975, p.148)

And in the final paragraph of his book, Clark uses the word “force” when he writes:

“... His studies of hydrodynamics suggest a power of water beyond human control; his studies of geology show that the earth has undergone cataclysmic upheavals ...; his studies of embryology point to a central problem of creation apparently insoluble by science. The intellect is no longer supreme, and human beings cease to be the centre of nature ... they are human no longer but symbols of force and mystery...” (Ibid, p.160)

Following the closure of the London art schools during the blitz, Richards returned to his native south Wales to teach at Cardiff Art School (1940-44). Like Dylan, he was opposed to the taking of life and he was in financial difficulty until the Cardiff post came up, thanks to Evan Charlton. I have discovered from his former students Joan Baker and Glenys Cour that Leonardo was one of the artists whose work Richards referred to as a teaching aid at Cardiff. And, as well as Clark’s 1939 book, there was Ludwig Goldscheider’s *Leonardo da Vinci* (Phaidon 1943).



(fig.1) Ceri Richards
The force that drives the water through the rocks 1943-44
© The Artist’s Estate
Private Collection

Richards took the opening line of Dylan’s second stanza for his first “force” painting *The force that drives the water through the rocks* (1943-44) because of his own fascination with water and the creative possibilities it offered. The rocky, strongly tidal coastline of south Wales extending from Cardiff to Swansea became an inspiration – his *Welsh Coastline* (1942) contains suggestions of the interaction of water and geology. During the war Richards lived in Cardiff and there was always his parental home in Dunvant. Even the Welsh name of that place where he had been raised just west of Swansea suggests ‘rough stream’ and there is its proximity to Gower where he later had a second home.

Another element in the development towards the first “force” painting is his contact with Henry Moore. They had studied together at the Royal College of Art and Richards used drawings by Moore as another teaching aid at Cardiff. The connection with Moore strengthened in 1943 when the sculptor wrote Richards a reference for a teaching job at Leeds:

“in my opinion, about the best draughtsman from life in the College and since then his power as a draughtsman has, of course, greatly increased ... Anyone who saw Mr Richards recent one-man exhibition of paintings and drawings at the Leger Gallery [in 1942] must have realised that here was an artist of unique creative and imaginative gifts and achievements ...” (Gooding, *Ceri Richards*, pp.62-3)



(fig.2) Ceri Richards *Cycle of Nature* 1944
© The Artist's Estate
Collection of National Museum Wales, Cardiff

Richards' *The Sculptor's Landscape: Homage to Henry Moore* (1943) shows an imaginative rendition of the geological and the anatomical and the links between these which were preoccupying Moore and Richards himself.

A second significant contact in 1943 was that with Tambimuttu, the editor of *Poetry London*, who requested a cover for the magazine and Dylan's poetry may well have been discussed. In the event, Richards' designs (featuring a lyre bird) were not used, but in 1945 he completed two lithographs based on Dylan's "the force" poem which were published by *Poetry London* two years later. The similarities between the lithographs and the "force" paintings are evident.

Certainly 1943 saw the start of the artist's life-long, manifest interest in Dylan despite the fact that they met only once, in Laugharne in 1953, immediately prior to what would be Dylan's final departure for America. The meeting was effected by the painter Alfred Janes.

Intriguingly, *The force that drives the water through the rocks* (1943-44) (fig. 1) was originally titled *Allegory of Blue and Red Figures*. It depicts two strange, interlinked figures (their hands emphasising the tactile) and rock-like, organic forms in the act of becoming or ending. His interest in Surrealism dated back to the Thirties (as did Dylan's) and the connections between Richards' work and that of Max Ernst have been made by Mel Gooding and others. In December 1938 Richards had bought Ernst's painting *La Mariée du Vent / The Bride of the Wind* (1926). Its title derives from the German word 'Windsbraut' which is the poetic name for a storm wind.

Richards took the painting into Cardiff Art School to show the students, including Joan Baker and Glenys Cour. He wrote:

"...[It has] a fine vigorous design – dramatic colour, and shapes full of vitality and movement – there is a terrific feeling of spontaneity, too. ... it [has] a mysterious fantastic unfamiliar quality – an atmosphere of foreboding.

We receive from it suggestions which push our imagination into a strange world, a world which fascinates us like dreams do, or something ominous, or as might Goya's Disasters of War." (Ibid, p.55)

The theme of powerful forces and the use of striking motifs, a distinctive palette and new techniques such as frottage in the Ernst informed Richards' wartime paintings, beginning with his *Blossoms* (1940) and *Falling Forms* (1941) and continuing into his "force" paintings of 1943-45. Count Ciano had described the aerial views of exploding bombs as flower like – and noteworthy here is the first line of Dylan's poem. Richards had direct experience of the Cardiff Blitz, reddened skies, bombs and incendiaries. He performed fire watching and anti-aircraft duties in the Ely Racecourse district of Cardiff – Joan Baker recalls that on one occasion Richards lost his eyebrows whilst extinguishing an incendiary which penetrated the Art School.

Mel Gooding writes about the influence of Leonardo da Vinci on Max Ernst who, in his *Au-delà de la Peinture (Beyond Painting)* published in

1936, quotes a passage from Leonardo's *Trattato della Pittura* in which Leonardo stated that even: "a sponge soaked with different colours thrown against a wall can make a smudge in which a beautiful landscape can be seen. ...I mean he that will gaze attentively at this spot will see in it human heads, various animals, a battle, some rocks, the sea, clouds, thickets and still more...". (Ibid, p. 60) Ernst goes on to state that his own technique of frottage was underpinned by this passage, writing that: "then my eyes perceived human heads, various animals, a battle ending in a kiss (The Bride of the Wind), rocks". (Ibid) However, any links between Richards and Leonardo are not made by Gooding or other writers.

The fact that the painting was first exhibited under its first title *Allegory of Blue and Red Figures* at the Redfern Gallery, London, in autumn 1944, suggests that the artist had more in mind than Dylan's poem. Here it is worth comparing Richards' blue figure and Leonardo's notebook drawing of a male contemplating the action of water. The Richards figure is eyeless (perhaps suggesting inner vision) and is intertwined with another (female) figure, partly suggested by the flashes of red (Dylan's "red blood"). This combination seems to derive from two other works by Leonardo: the *Virgin, St Anne, Christ Child and Baptist* (also known as *The Burlington House Cartoon*) in the National Gallery and the *Virgin, St Anne, Christ Child and Lamb* in the Louvre.

One is reminded of Clark who wrote: "contrasted interlocking rhythms enclosed in a single shape" and "the design has the exhilarating quality of an elaborate fugue" (Clark, *Leonardo da Vinci*, p.137). Clark's musical reference (he goes on to name Bach) would have appealed to Richards who was an accomplished pianist. And, for the sculptural qualities of Richards and Leonardo's figure compositions, the marbles of Michelangelo come to mind, the blue right arm in the Richards suggesting a borrowing from Michelangelo's contemplative Lorenzo de Medici statue. There is a hint of a plinth too. In short, Richards is synthesising a variety of cultural sources – Ernst, Dylan, Moore, Leonardo and Michelangelo – to make his own unique creation.

The second “force” painting, titled *Cycle of Nature* (1944) (fig.2), is a more developed picture which synthesises more effectively Dylan’s poem and the vision of Ernst and Leonardo: the “force” motif (the vertical axis of organic elements suggesting the sexual organs of plants and humans, climaxing in a Dionysian bunch of grapes); the sense of powerful forces (of Ernstian and Leonardesque wind, water, movement, destruction); and perhaps even of lion’s legs derived from Delacroix’s *Lion Hunt* pictures which Richards was looking at around this time.

“The painter can call into being the essences of animals of all kinds, of plants, fruits, landscapes, rolling plains, crumbling mountains, fearful and terrible places; and again pleasant places, sweet and delightful with meadows of many-coloured flowers bent by the gentle motion of the wind...; and then rivers falling from high mountains with the force of great floods, ruins which drive down with them uprooted plants mixed with rocks, roots, earth, and foam...; and then the stormy sea, striving and wrestling with the winds”
(Leonardo da Vinci in: Ibid, p.80)

Relevant here are Leonardo’s notebook drawings of writhing plants and human anatomy and his notions of process and circulation in nature and in the body. There is also the role of the artists’ formative environments – Richards and Leonardo’s semi-rural Dunvant and Vinci as opposed to the urbanised centres of Swansea and Florence to which they subsequently moved.

Richards’ picture, which appears to have sand mixed into the oil paint, can be read as an abstracted map of Swansea Bay and Gower, the “force” motif coinciding with Dunvant and the prancing, leonine legs sited where the southwesterlies make landfall and roar across the peninsula. Perhaps this is not too fanciful, given his sequel to the three “force” paintings, *Black Apple of Gower / Afal Du Brogŵyr* (1952) subtitled ‘Gwrogaeth i Dylan’. Richards later wrote that he would be “very interested to see this quartette [sic] of paintings hung together.” (Ceri Richards letter to Iorwerth & Elizabeth Hughes Jones, 27 May 1960)

The force that through the green fuse: The Source (1945) (fig.3) is now owned by the Glynn Vivian Art Gallery. When writing to the original owners about this third “force” painting, Richards stated: “I have called it ‘Cycle of Nature’ just as I have called the Cardiff Museum version. The force... poem is just that isn’t it – in every verse – and the design in the two paintings is cyclic – perhaps specially so in yours.” (Ibid) Earlier he had written that it was: “... the culmination of my interest in a poem by Dylan Thomas – The force that through the green fuse drives the flower ... Dylan ought to incant the poem in front of it in order to give it its final aura.” (Ceri Richards letters to Iorwerth Hughes Jones, 9 October and 12 November 1952)

Here, the “force” motif has been moved to the left and there are other more clearly defined elements such as the water source (Dylan’s “mouthing ...mountain spring”) and the unrestrained horse and male rider who are irresistibly drawn to that water. Richards’ working process is indicated in a study for the painting where the female figure has not yet been abstracted. The rising forms morph, via Dionysian grapes, into the horse’s tail.

Closer inspection of the horse’s head and its spiralling, flowing mane and the abstracted fallen/reclining male figure suggests a reworking of elements found in Leonardo’s lost *Battle of Anghiari* (1505) which is known through a copy by Rubens (c.1604). Richards seems to be taking from Leonardo’s descriptions and sketches of the frenzy of war (“most beastly madness”) and copulation (“the act of coitus and the parts employed in it ... and [its] participants and their frenetic disposition”) and he makes them his own.

In conclusion, Ceri Richards’ three “force” paintings are highly original works which integrate: figure and land; animal, vegetable, mineral; nature and mankind. They imaginatively synthesise his dramatic first-hand experiences of life and war in south Wales and they demonstrate his absorption and transformation of other artistic sources. Furthermore, they represent the start of his engagement with the poetry of Dylan and prepare the way for his next series of paintings *The Rape of the Sabines* (1947-48) as well as for his engagement with the poetry of another Gower-loving individual, Vernon Watkins.

On the occasion of the 1960 Cardiff National Eisteddfod, the second and third “force” paintings were exhibited, along with *Black Apple of Gower*, and in the accompanying exhibition catalogue the artist wrote: “One can generally say that all artists – poets, musicians, painters, are creating in their own idioms, metaphors for the nature of existence, for the secrets of their time.” (Ceri Richards, *Homage to Music and Poetry*, 1960)

© Ceri Thomas 2015



(fig.3) Ceri Richards
The force that through the green fuse: The Source 1945
© The Artist’s Estate
City & County of Swansea: Glynn Vivian Art Gallery Collection

Gordon Stuart (1924 – 2015)



Gordon Stuart in his studio, Uplands, Swansea

On a Mumbles Road bus I once overheard a group of school-leavers tentatively reveal where their grandparents had come from. Three answers were unsurprising but when the fourth friend said 'Belarus' silence ensued and all four turned to look out of the windows.

Conversations such as this have always been meat and drink for me, for as a teacher of History I urged undergraduates to place themselves in History by tracing their roots in the context of the significant patterns of the past. It was always interesting to look at trajectories, the circumstances that led to first migration and then adaptation. In these stories employment, opportunity and romance all tended to play a part.

In August 1995, on one of the most memorable days in the recent history of Swansea, former President Jimmy Carter came to Swansea to open a 'House of Literature', to 'bless' a literary festival and to receive the freedom of the City. He came because of his admiration of Dylan Thomas and because, as a poet himself, he fully appreciated the wider Anglo-Welsh literary tradition. At all three events on that day the President exuded grace, style and scholarly interest: it was a visit that was to be very appropriately commemorated in a portrait and drawings by local artist Gordon Stuart, who fully captured the dignity, modesty and scholarly reserve of a very honourable man, hitherto one of the most powerful men in the world.

And so it was that this red-letter day was given its place in our collective memory by the art of a man born in Toronto in 1924 and who had left school aged fifteen to work at a factory making metal boxes. Very few of his later Swansea acquaintances would have known that it was the Royal Canadian Army that brought Gordon to Europe and that after service in Italy, France and Holland he lived in Rome, Paris and London where he painted backdrops for Harrods window displays. A fascinating trajectory then for an apprentice painter but one that had not found resolution and definition. It was in his late twenties that Gordon travelled to West Wales where everything fell into place. In a distinctive landscape, to which he immediately responded, he fell in love with Mair to whom he was to be married for sixty years, and during the three afternoons that he spent painting Dylan Thomas he came to appreciate

the extent to which his own skills might allow him to capture the essence of literary, artistic and public distinction.

Gordon and Mair lived in one of those elevated Swansea homes offering a grandstand view of Dylan's 'splendid' bay but nearly all the works they had retained, on their walls or in piles, confirmed an artistic devotion to that same area of Carmarthenshire that Dylan had loved and to the technique of portraiture. The estuarine and riverside farmlands of Carmarthenshire form one of the most attractive regions of Wales and nobody has so delicately captured its age-old calming softness as Gordon. No wonder that the County Council invested in his work: this is a landscape that bestowed identity and a sense of well-being and Gordon was fully able to confirm all of that. A minimum splash of colour and the depiction of identifiable farm buildings help capture a real place and a unique moment in this largely grey and gently green world.



Gordon Stuart *The Flag, Gower* 1980 oil on canvas
Collection of Carmarthenshire Museums Service

It is however as a portrait painter that Gordon will be chiefly remembered. He will be known to gallery visitors in Canada, America and London but once more it was very much within the Welsh context that Gordon developed an interest in the manner in which the head and the face could be used to convey the personality and cultural idiom of individual personalities. Ironically those depictions of Dylan (the last before the poet's death) which brought Gordon to the public's attention, were perhaps not to be his finest work. Perhaps there is a need for a full survey of Dylan's appearance (there is no moving image of him) for in particular portraits or photographs he can look angelic, princely, distinguished or disheveled, bloated and dissolute. The crucial element is often what Dylan described as his 'snub nose' that appears differently even in photographs. Gordon was painting a subject who was at his lowest ebb. There is a terrible melancholy about the profiled Dylan version that we have in Swansea, but it is the melancholy of a clown and it wouldn't be a surprise to learn that the nose was false. In the National Portrait Gallery version the bloated double-chinned Dylan looks like a Venetian market stallholder.

It would be interesting to view these depictions of Dylan alongside Gordon's 1957 portrait of Kingsley Amis (also in the NPG). At that time Amis was the darling of the literati and Swansea's most famous resident. Gordon brilliantly captures him as a smug pipe-smoking academic, a conceited dandy whose well tendered locks are shown against a wall of books. This is the man who mocked Thomas whilst he was alive and then ridiculed the town's commemoration of him.

It was the legacy of both Dylan and Amis that in 1995 enabled Swansea to land the prize of being the UK's City of Literature and Writing. Gordon was the obvious choice to be the official artist of what turned out to be a stunning year long festival. Many of the world's greatest writers just fell into Gordon's lap. The subsequent years and in particular exhibitions at the Dylan Thomas Centre have fully confirmed the brilliance that Gordon displayed during that Festival and its aftermath. I was on the Board of that event and loved every moment of it but nothing gave me greater pleasure than being asked by Planet to review Gordon's output. Time after time the artist had chosen the colours, medium, pose and expression that brought to life the world of the individual writers. We have Nigel Jenkins as John the Baptist, R.S. Thomas as an Old Testament prophet, Robertson Davies as a Canadian merchant-prince, Raymond Garlick as an exotic magician and so on. Famously, as visitors to the NPG can testify, Beryl Bainbridge and Bernice Rubens come together to smoke and natter in what must surely be a Neapolitan tenement.

Gordon had hoped that his work would form the basis of a National Portrait Gallery in Wales. They should certainly be a foundation for a Swansea Pantheon. Nobody was more capable of enshrining the cultural life of the City in an artistic form and one hopes that this remarkable skill of combining verisimilitude

and cultural empathy on canvas will not pass out of fashion. In Gordon's case I have no doubt that his skills were related to his own humility and quiet patience. He was capable of sharp insights and cryptic and wicked judgements, but he was first and foremost a watcher and a listener totally alert to the nuances of personal gesture and style.

Gordon had become a chronicler of Swansea and its hinterland, one with an almost unique understanding of the various individual skills that came together to constitute our cultural milieu. Perhaps his early Dylan portraits are too honest for our taste but surely his Glynn Vivian-owned portrait of Daniel Jones could stand as an embodiment of all that was remarkable in the wonderful world of pre-war Swansea. A head of white hair against a very pale blue background brings the subject forward as a distinguished intellectual, possibly a winner of the Nobel Prize for Physics from Princeton, yet the intense eyes and delicate skin place him more in a West Wales manse. It's the fiery colour in the cheeks that hints at something more and helps to explain his musical genius (thirteen symphonies and lots of chamber music) and his time decoding at Bletchley Park and then as an intelligence officer in the army. This is the man who nurtured both Dylan's literary talent and encouraged his sense of both irreverence and confidence in the face of critical orthodoxy. It was he who made it normal to discuss Einstein and Schoenberg in the pubs of west Swansea and made even Kingsley Amis realise that there was far more to this place than met the eye. Quietly and charmingly Gordon Stuart painted all of that.



Gordon Stuart
Portrait of Daniel Jones oil on canvas
Presented to the Gallery by the
Friends in 1996
City & County of Swansea:
Glynn Vivian Art Gallery Collection

© Peter Stead 2015

Peter Stead's 'Gordon Stuart's Writers' appeared in Planet 118, 1996.

This tribute was written as Gordon's two studies of the author looked down on the desk.

100 Club News

Recent winners since the last newsletter are:-

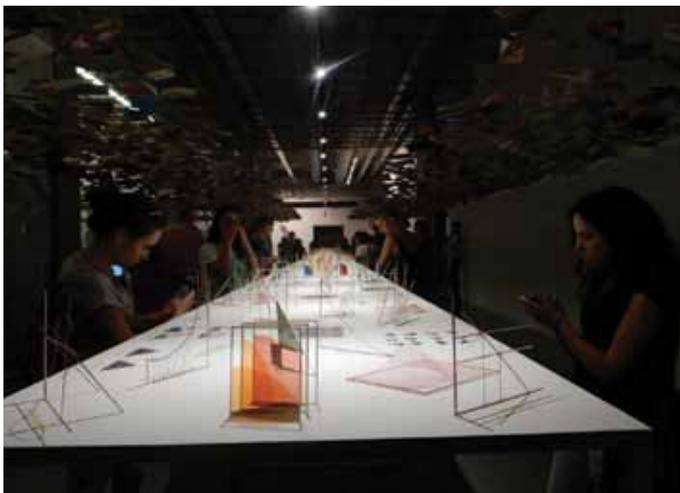
September	number	81	Elisabeth Fussell	£25	November	94	Betty Lewis	£25
		96	Betty Lewis	£10		82	Andrew Green	£10
October		83	Andrew Green	£25	December	87	Sylvia Twigg	£25
		53	Angela George	£10		09	John Crooks	£10

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14th Istanbul Biennial

SALTWATER: A Theory of Thought Forms



Richard Ibghy & Marilou Lemmens *The Prophets* 2013-ongoing
Wood, acetate, thread, metal wire and mesh

We recently had a week's holiday in Istanbul. Serendipitously and unbeknown to us this week coincided with the 14th Istanbul Biennial. Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, curator of the Biennial states:-

"The exhibition hovers around a material – salt water – and the contrasting image-forms of knots and waves... This city wide exhibition on the Bosphorus considers different frequencies and patterns of waves, the currents and densities of water both visible and invisible that poetically and politically shape and transform the world... SALTWATER takes place in museums and also in temporary spaces of habitation on land and on sea, such as boats, hotel rooms, former banks, garages, gardens, schools, shops and private homes."



Meriç Algün Ringborn *Have you ever seen a fig tree blossom?* 2015
Fig leaves on hotel bedroom floor

Our holiday took on a new purpose, and we'd like to share a few of the 1,500 art works that made up the Biennial, held in this fascinating, chaotic, densely populated city, where Near East meets Europe.

At **Istanbul Modern** was an installation, *The Prophets*, by Richard Ibghy & Marilou Lemmens. A representation of economic activities by graphs, diagrams and models using fragile and delicate materials: does this highlight the vulnerability of economic predictions?

At the **Adahan Istanbul Hotel** was an installation by Meriç Algün Ringborn *Have you ever seen a fig tree blossom?*

The curator writes "What remains of paradise? Galata (an area of Istanbul) was full of figs; now, of hotel rooms. Adam and Eve cover themselves in shame. Queen Victoria had a fig leaf made to hide David's genitals, and today, there are ever more veils."



Expulsion from the Garden of Eden
Copy of fresco by Masaccio in the Brancicci Chapel, Florence, on hotel bedroom wall



Marcos Lutyens *Neurathian Boat Strap (detail)* 2015
mixed media

On **Büyükdada**, one of the Princes' Islands in the Sea of Marmara, southeast of downtown Istanbul, were further highlights for us. Marcos Lutyens had created a series of installations entitled *Neurathian Boat Strap*. They were situated throughout the inside of a hydrofoil - Kaptan Paşa Sea Bus – a ship which operates in the Sea of Marmara, but had been berthed here for the duration of the Biennial. The bowels of the ship contained no passengers but an installation constructed of materials which included, felt, elements of a wooden boat, lamps, ropes, stools, chladni plates, sound recordings, prosthetic limbs, video projections, hypnosis sessions and performance.

Also on **Büyükdada** is *Trotsky House*, where Leon Trotsky lived between 1932-33. The mansion was built in the 1850s but is now derelict. We wandered through the grounds of the mansion to reach the installation, a powerful group of animal sculptures by Adrián Villar Rojas – *The Most Beautiful of All Mothers*. Sited in the sea, just off-shore, this 'pack' of animal statues, adorned (or perhaps burdened) with organic detritus, gazed hauntingly towards the viewer and the abandoned ruins of the house. The highlight of the Biennial for us.



Trotsky House



Adrián Villar Rojas *The Most Beautiful of All Mothers* 2015 mixed media

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“The Welsh Kiss”

Under the enthusiastic leadership of Daniel Trevidy, our newly formed discussion group, Art, Friends and Conversation, held its second meeting in the bar of The Dragon Hotel. At our first meeting, it was decided that each of us should visit the Davies Sisters' Collection at the National Museum of Wales in Cardiff and choose an item to discuss informally with our new friends and fellow members. It was rather like being a child in a sweet shop, exciting, exasperating and daunting.

I had not seen the Davies Sisters' Collection for ten years or more, and it was a sharp reminder - to me anyway - of how often we take their bequest for granted. The scale and the quality of the exhibits are breathtaking. I was intrigued by the passion and vision which had motivated these extraordinary women. They spent more than fifty years buying paintings and sculptures which were not always in accord with the popular taste of the time. Most were avant-garde, some of them were controversial, and a few, positively scandalous.

Not least among the Collection in this respect is a bronze cast of *The Kiss* by Auguste Rodin, a sculpture every bit as famous as the *Venus de Milo* or Michelangelo's *David*. It certainly ranks alongside his greatest work, *The Thinker*, as one of the most recognisable works of art in the world. Standing 182 cms in height, it forms the centrepiece of the first room. It can be viewed and appreciated from every angle as its creator intended it to be. Unlike paintings which form the bulk of the Collection, it is not a unique work of art for there are several examples of *The Kiss* in private and public hands, but it is an original in the sense that it was a cast authorised by the master himself and made during his lifetime. It is believed to be the third of an edition of twelve, and only the first twelve casts are considered official according to French law.

A work of the French Impressionist School, it depicts a fleeting moment in the love affair of Francesca da Rimini and her husband's younger brother, Paolo Malatesta, just before the deceived husband discovers them embracing, and puts them to the sword. Paolo holds in his left hand a book telling the story of Lancelot and Guinevere, another romantic affair which had inspired their passion. The sculpture was bought by Gwendoline Davies for £3000 in 1912, the very year she and her sister, Margaret, had first turned their attention to acquiring works by Impressionist artists. It was, in every sense, a daring and unlikely addition to the Collection for the two ladies were shy, retiring spinsters brought up in the heart of rural mid Wales in a strict, Calvinistic tradition. Despite their great wealth, they do not seem to have attracted any male suitors; they were teetotal and did not engage with the fun and frivolity of Edwardian society. None of the paintings they bought depict nude figures



Auguste Rodin *The Kiss* bronze 1902
Collection of National Museum Wales, Cardiff
Gifted in 1940 by Gwendoline Davies

climbing out of baths, street scenes alive with cafes, horse racing, cabarets or theatres which subjects we tend to associate with French Impressionism. Yet, *The Kiss*, is a sensual and graphic expression of illicit love which contradicts everything the sisters would be expected to admire. It was only a few years earlier that the sculpture was thought to be so shocking it had to be exhibited in a secluded area and viewing of it by special appointment.

However, their modest and unassuming characters disguised the fact that they were well-educated and highly accomplished women who knew their own minds. They were frequent travellers to the Continent, devoting much of the time to the serious study of fine art. They were fluent in French, Italian and probably German too having studied in Leipzig. Much has been made of the fact that they relied on the opinion of experts regarding their acquisitions. This is not strictly true. They sought advice in the male dominated world of auction houses and export permits, but the two ladies always knew what they liked and the final decision was theirs, and theirs alone. They shared a desire to fill their lives with beauty. This was the driving force in building the Collection, and in creating the gardens at Llandinam

and later at Gregynog. There, they established the Gregynog Press which produced books and manuscripts of extraordinary beauty and an arts centre to promote sublime choral and organ music.

Significantly, they gave away far more of their wealth to charitable causes than they spent on their art collection, much of it going to alleviate poverty and suffering in the industrial heartland of Wales. Their grandfather, David Davies, had made a vast fortune from coal mining in the Welsh valleys, building railways to the coast and developing Barry Docks. Gwendoline and Margaret were almost apologetic for the source of their wealth and I have the feeling that their religious conviction as well as a profound attachment to the people of Wales compelled them to atone for the brutality of industrialisation and the hardship this imposed on its landscape and its population. They wanted to hand back to Wales something of the beauty that it had lost, and it became their life's work to build their Collection as recompense.

As for *The Kiss*, it is the essence of the beauty they aspired to. It can also be seen as a metaphor representing the love the Davies Sisters felt for Wales, and further expressed by them in their munificent bequest to the country and the people they so admired. In my view, there is good reason to think of this masterpiece as “*The Welsh Kiss*”.

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