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Newsletter Spring 2019
Cylchlythyr Gwanwyn 2019

Hello!

Welcome to this Spring edition of the newsletter. You have probably heard the exciting news that the gallery has a new curator, Karen McKinnon. Also, by the time you read this a new Chairman of the Friends, Daniel Trivedy, will have been elected and we are all very much looking forward to the year ahead - more from Daniel in the next issue. Exciting new developments all round!

We must thank our student members graphic designers Calum Lewis and Ashleigh Price, for their fantastic work on our new website and membership leaflet. We hope that every issue of the newsletter will have a written contribution from a student; this issue features a Welsh article from Rhys Page who is studying illustration at Swansea College of Art and Design. 'Letter from the Tate' is also uncovering interesting Welsh work in the Tate collection - more to be included in subsequent editions.

Thank you all for your continuing support and we look forward to seeing you at our forthcoming Events and of course at the Gallery!

Louise and Kay
(Editorial team)

Front Cover: Hilary Rosen, *Botanical Gardens*, 2011, Lino, Courtesy of the artist

Wakelin Award Selection 2018

Laura Ford



Richard Billingham, *Mandrills*, 2005, Chromogenic print. Acquired with the support of the Art Fund; the Arts Council England/V&A Purchase Grant Fund; and the Friends of the Glynn Vivian Art Gallery. City & County of Swansea: Glynn Vivian Art Gallery Collection. Courtesy of the artist.

I am a big fan of the photographs Richard Billingham took of his family in Cradley Heath; an incredibly candid body of work that was included in Saatchi's notorious *Sensation* show of young British artists at the Royal Academy in 1997, and brought Billingham's work to prominence. The seminal work was also published in the acclaimed book *Ray's A Laugh* (published 1996).

Some years later I saw his photographic series of zoos. I found them emotionally compelling and the images stuck with me - they continue to shape and inform my thoughts today about human relationships with animals. I enjoyed that the photographs were not a critique or an illustration of ideas about zoos, but they had a certain distance allowing the viewer to make up their own minds as to what they were looking at.

When I was asked to choose a work of art for the Wakelin Award and saw these works were among the selection for consideration, they immediately became my first choice. My favourite of the

series is *Mandrills* because it captures the complexity of the viewing relationship between the captive animals, their audience and the viewer. I enjoy the jarring nature of the painted landscape within a real landscape and the very subtle feeling of confinement and resignation that it creates. Given the Glynn Vivian's strong collection of landscape focused work, I felt that this piece would fit really well within that context and also have a wide appeal for the public audience.

For more information on the Wakelin Award, please visit friendsoftheglynnvivan.com

Squatters: Laura Ford

TEN. presents an exhibition of new works by Laura Ford in partnership with Cadw.

Laura Ford unveils a series of new sculptures inside Wales' iconic Castell Coch [the Red Castle], as visitors are invited to discover over 20 works created by one of the UK's leading contemporary artists.

Ford riffs on the castle's fabled past to imagine a new generation of anthropomorphic inhabitants.

Castell Coch, Cardiff CF15 7JS.
Exhibition open from 30th March to 6th May 2019. Opening times: Daily 9.30am - 5.00pm.
Admission fees apply



'The Little Lords' © Laura Ford.
Image courtesy of TEN.

Photograph by Jon Pountney

William Emes, Designer of Dreams

Plans and Places of an 18th Century Gardener in Wales

Prue Keely

Who hasn't wished for a paradise designed just for them? A personal dream of ancient trees, a graceful lake, peacefully grazing sheep, views out on to the magnificent landscape which would certainly surround such a haven of peace and plenty.

William Emes (1730 - 1803), was a purveyor of such dreams to eighteenth century land owners, not least in Wales. A so-called 'landscape improver and surveyor', he made his own fortune designing Gardens of Eden for others.

During the eighteenth century, a time of economic expansion and industrial revolution across Britain - not least in Wales - a few people became very wealthy. As they watched their money grow, they began to think about how to spend it. And the Georgian equivalent of a mega-yacht, a football club or a private island was - an English Landscape Park.

Emes had a successful practice in Wales, designing landscapes for at least ten estates, in the north and the south, whereas his far better known contemporary Lancelot 'Capability' Brown was involved at just three. Some of his projects survive only as plans, but four have stayed virtually intact and others subsist in part, making Wales an excellent place to study Emes's legacy to the English landscape movement.

Millions were spent all over Britain, providing trophy gardens and parks for rich landowners. People ruined themselves for them. Chirk Castle in what was then Denbighshire, is one of the best preserved Emes estates. In 1764 the young and dashing Sir Richard Myddleton - inheritor of a fine fortune founded on land and the East India Company in which his ancestor Sir Thomas was an original shareholder nearly two hundred years earlier - called in the equally young William Emes to replace the formal gardens



Left: *Chirk Castle from the North*, Peter Tillemans c.1730s, © Amgueddfa Genedlaethol Cymru/National Museum of Wales.
 Right: *Chirk Castle after Emes*, John Warwick Smith (1749-1831), courtesy of Lowell-Libson Ltd.

surrounding his fierce squat marcher fortress with the smooth curves of a Capability Brown style park. It was an ambitious project which took many years to complete. In fact it lasted through most of Emes's career. Thousands of tonnes of earth were literally moved from place to place, trees were planted and cut down, water dammed and a mile-long haha built to create the necessary visual illusion of a seamless transition from inner to outer park. Sir Richard Myddleton and his beautiful wife, Elizabeth Rushout, were also upgrading the inside of their fortress into an elegant Georgian mansion, and, as funds fluctuated they had to call a halt several times – and afterwards the Myddletons were never truly rich again.

Just across the Dee valley outside Wrexham, their neighbours, Philip Yorke of Erddig and his young wife, Elizabeth Cust had similar ideas, albeit on a more modest scale and for somewhat different reasons, which highlight one of Emes's strengths as a designer: his ability to combine



The View of the West front of Erddig from the Park, Moses Griffiths, showing the results of Emes's landscaping. 1770s. ©NTPL/John Hammond

hydraulic engineering to "improve" an estate from an economic point of view, with embellishing it. At Erddig, he dealt with unruly twin rivers which, to quote a contemporary, had a troublesome and costly habit of "eating out the heart" of low-lying meadows, impairing Philip Yorke's tenant farmers' yields, and thus his rental income. Emes was involved at Erddig for two decades, modifying the rivers, improving and beautifying the park and woodlands with "pleasure grounds", paths, rides, and perimeter planting. Like the Myddletons, the Yorkes' finances never really recovered, though both estates remained in the same families well into the twentieth century; in the end, both mansions, and their Emes gardens, were bequeathed to the National Trust.

The park at Penrice Castle miraculously survives almost as Emes left it. It was made for Thomas Mansel Talbot, an example of the eighteenth century cognoscenti-cum-sportsman who, in the early '70s, decided to build a shooting box at his wonderfully situated Gower estate – a place he called "the most romantic in the country". This was another of Emes's long-term projects, some twenty years ... And it highlights two consistent aspects of his career: durable relationships with patrons for whom he appears to have acted as a regular consultant who came and went as needed, frequently delegating on site to his own foremen who then employed local men, and his adaptable style, not so much imposing on the landscape (à la Brown), as "gentling" it into submission to the prevailing fashion. At Penrice we see how the "punctuation" (as Brown described it) of a talented landscape designer can convert a naturally attractive topography into an "ideal" landscape: adding and subtracting trees, emphasizing the middle ground of a



Left: View from Penrice Castle, showing the lake in middle distance view and perimeter plantations which draw the eye to Oxwich Bay. The terrace is a Victorian addition! (Photo courtesy of the author). Right: Penrice Castle, Mansion and Garden. Aerial photograph by Toby Driver. © Crown Copyright: Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales © Hawlfraint y Goron: Comisiwn Brenhinol Henebion Cymru.

view with a lake, pointing up the curves of the ground with shaped planting, drawing the eye on to the distance.

There is no known surviving plan for Penrice, but an aerial view shows what he and his patron did with the landscape. It doesn't show the coast, but we see the handsome house in its Brownian "sea" of grass, backed by a genuine, mediaeval castle which gives it the picturesque element of what the contemporary cultural critic, Horace Walpole called a "true rust of the barons' wars"; away to the top right a new old folly forming the lodge; a wandering path through woodland to a little garden with a "greenhouse" (what we would call an orangery); and the great curving lake.

At Broad Lane, Hawarden, Emes, produced, at a very awkward site, an assured and romantic plan for a small park belonging to Sir Stephen Glynne. At the right hand edge of the drawing is the old castle ruin, on its circular mound, which Emes has decorated with trees and shrubs to lead the eye down to a small heart-shaped lake, set against a backdrop of trees. This was to have been created out of a wandering stream which Emes has lined with more small clumps to provide viewpoints from a path along it.

What a shame that Sir Stephen died in a hunting accident and so never turned this dream into a reality.

We know of about forty surviving plans by William Emes – consistently and elegantly drawn in Indian ink, almost certainly by himself. Some have fold marks, showing how they were thrust into a pocket as a landowner and his steward,



Emes's plan for Broad Lane Hawarden, 1777. Courtesy of Flintshire County Record Office.

or perhaps Emes himself, trod the ground of a future serpentine lake, or worked out which trees and shrubs it would be best to plant where.

Many dreams of course never come true and some of Emes plans survive immaculate, showing no telltale signs of use. Perhaps they only ever adorned a library table, laid out to show the neighbours that this owner and his lady were cultivated people of "polite taste" – that all important touchstone of Georgian social success – able to draw on the advice of one of the best eighteenth century landscape designers and improvers.

The IOO Club Winners

JANUARY Number 81 £25 Penny Burton. Number 33 £10 Constance Hill.

FEBRUARY Number 18 £25 Eryl Jenkins. Number 57 £10 J. Williams.

MARCH Number 83 £25 Penny Burton. Number 79 £10 Pamela Davies.

APRIL Number 70 £25 Betty Lewis. Number 86 £10 M.B.Jones.

The Annual £100 prize was won by Number 76 Pamela Davies.

The 100 Club raised £700 for the Friends of Glynn Vivian in the year 2018-2019.

The Club was started in 1991 to raise extra funds for the Glynn Vivian Gallery.

Forms for joining were included with the AGM mailing and the first draw takes place in June.

For more information please email friendsglynnviv@gmail.com.

Peter Blake: Collages and Illustration

Gwenllian Beynon

A recent visit to the Glynn Vivian to see the Peter Blake: *Collages and Illustrations* exhibition (Dec 2018 – Jan 2019) was like a collision of cultures and time. Blake's *Under Milk Wood* collages stirred in me a reminiscence of a Welsh cultural heritage from my youth in Wales that no longer seems to exist. And in the collages there is also a connection to Pop Art, a 1960s art movement, of which Peter Blake was a UK pioneer.

This cultural collision also occurs in another way, in that Blake himself produced the celebrity collaged album cover for The Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, released by EMI Records in 1967 (Blake 1967). Blake again takes me back to my youth, but a very different youth culture to that of *Under Milk Wood*. This collage of celebrities continues with the



Sir Peter Blake: *Collage and Illustration*, 2018. Installation View: Glynn Vivian Art Gallery, Swansea. Photography: Matt Wright, 4Pi Productions, 2018.

limited edition print that Blake produced for the Swansea exhibition - *Joseph Cornell meets Dylan Thomas in Swansea*. Also appearing in this print are Harry Secombe, Katherine Jenkins, Richard Burton, Catherine Zeta Jones, Tom Jones, Shirley Bassey and to add to this visit to the Glynn Vivian, a woman in Welsh traditional costume.

This Exhibition celebrated the 60th Anniversary of the Friends of the Glynn Vivian and included collages, drawings and illustrative portraits of the characters from *Under Milk Wood*.

The Exhibition space, on the second floor of the Glynn Vivian, was bright and airy, the works were well exhibited and presented in a way that made

viewing pleasurable and clear. The *Under Milk Wood* collages start with a small black square in the middle of an off white paper that is for me a lovely representation of the black the 'bible-black, ...sloeblack, slow, black, crowblack' 'bombazine black' and 'Dai Bread's bakery flying like black flour' black of Dylan Thomas' *Under Milk Wood: A Play for Voices* (1954). Blake's small collages explore *Under Milk Wood* in a Pop Art way, bringing together found images to illustrate the story. Also seen on the collages are elements of the play written in pencil on the off-white paper.

As someone who loves colour, it is therefore strange that my favourite works in this exhibition were the illustrative drawings of the characters from *Under Milk Wood*. These drawings, produced in different type of pencil, were produced on various tones of grey paper, with white for highlighting. I was fascinated by the tonal quality of the illustrations as a whole and wondered about the choice and placement of the different tones of grey paper. Blake "admits to enjoying the playful challenge he presents to viewers in interpreting what he calls a "giant jigsaw".' (Lycett 2013).

All of the drawings were fitted into a portrait rectangle, in the centre of the grey paper, of what appeared to be the same size. Within the drawings some of the *Under Milk Wood* characters filled the rectangles almost attempting to break out of the restraints of the drawings, some of the characters were drawn at the bottom of the rectangle almost falling out of the rectangle.

Blake's draughtsmanship in these works is incredible and the illustration of the characters provide a visual rendition, in relation to the work of Thomas himself. For his influence in these images, in addition to his imagination, Blake draws on Actors from readings of *Under Milk Wood* such as Richard Burton and in some of the images uses recognisable features of well-known celebrities for example 'with the addition of a beard and a sailor's cap and Rosie Probert has the features of Elizabeth Taylor. Other drawings are more bizarre, such as Waldo's wife, who is based on Terry Wogan, while Mrs Utah Watkins is unmistakably Beryl Bainbridge.' (Lycett 2013).

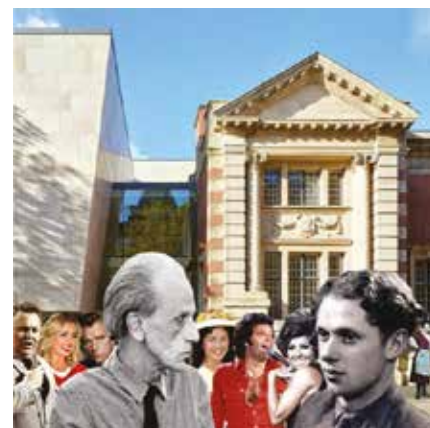
This cultural time and creative collision in these images at the

Glynn Vivian was a wonderful experience. The illustrative portraits on the grey paper in the 'giant jigsaw' (Lycett 2013) was by far my favourite.

References

Blake (1967) *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*. (V&A).
Lycett, A. (22 Nov 2013) *Peter Blake: Drawing Under Milk Wood* *The Guardian* (Online).

Gwenllian Beynon is a Senior Lecturer, and Art & Design Well-being of Future Generations Co-ordinator, with a focus on Welsh medium and culture provision, at Swansea College of Art & Design.



Joseph Cornell meets Dylan Thomas in Swansea, Peter Blake 2018, Collage. © Peter Blake.

Anyone wishing to purchase a print please contact the Glynn Vivian Gallery: (01792 516900).

Swansea Open Prize Winner

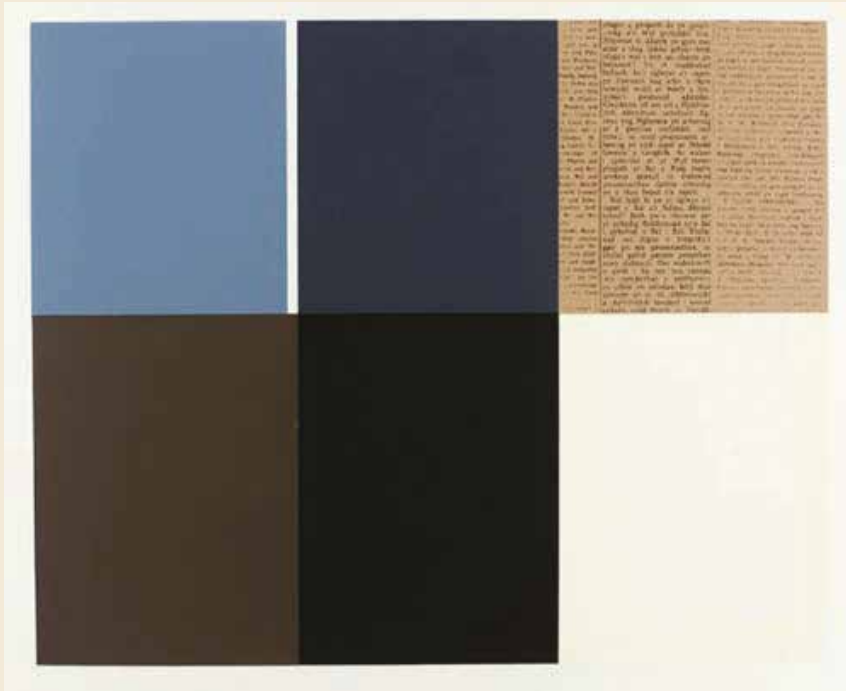
The Friends prize for the Swansea Open Exhibition in December 2018 at the Glynn Vivian Gallery was selected by Peter Blake. The winner was John Mathewson, for his acrylic painting: *Nightmares – The Torment of Captain Cat*, 2016 (right). He was presented with a cheque for £200 by the Friends President, Angela Maddock (far right).



Above: Photo courtesy of Matt Wright, 4Pi Productions, 2018. Right: Photo courtesy of Anja Steniner.



Letter From the Tate



Letter From the Tate is a regular feature written by a member of Tate staff about a Welsh-related work in the Tate collection.

Visitor Assistant and artist/actor Kenneth Price has chosen Kenneth Rowntree's 'Welsh Print'.

Above: Welsh Print (1970) by Kenneth Rowntree. © The estate of Kenneth Rowntree. This work can be viewed online at www.tate.org, or by appointment in the prints and drawings room at Tate Britain.

A Memory of Kenneth Rowntree

In the spring of 1972, I travelled up from my native Wales for an interview at Newcastle University where I hoped to study Fine Art; "Get Carter country" Mr Aylott the P.E. teacher at my school, Brynmawr Comp, had warned. He couldn't have been more wrong, at least on the evidence of the art department, a beautiful amalgam of old and new, the influence of tutors like Richard Hamilton and Victor Pasmore and illustrious students like Bryan Ferry and Sean Scully still resonant.

Relieved of my portfolio of school-work, I waited my turn outside Professor Rowntree's office. Eventually I was called in for interview but by then any confidence had all but disappeared. A selection of work from my portfolio had been pinned to a wall for scrutiny and interrogation. One painting, the view from my parents' bedroom in Brynmawr (right), drew particular interest. "Ah yes, Brynmawr" Prof noted, wistfully. I nodded and surprised that such an undistinguished outlook should be so instantly recognisable, asked him how he knew. He told me that as a much younger man he and a group of fellow Quakers had gone there in the 30's to help in the construction of an outdoor swimming pool, a selfless gesture of support for a community in the midst of a severe economic depression. Years later, in the 1960's, undeterred by the inevitable temperature of the water, I swam regularly in that same pool, unaware then of its provenance but now taken aback at this remarkable coincidence.

I was accepted and throughout my six years there (I stayed to do an MA), Prof always looked out for me. His lovely paintings inspired me and my glorious time there changed my life forever.



Top: Construction of the Swimming Baths. Middle: Swimming Baths, 1938. Swimming Bath photos are courtesy of Brynmawr Historical Society. More images can be viewed at www.brynmawrhistoricalsociety.org.uk/swimming-baths.

Above: Brynmawr View 1971, Kenneth Price

Astudiaeth o gelf Cedric Morris a chynrychiolaeth diwydiant yng nghelf Cymru

Rhys Page

Mae'r ddelwedd *The Tips Dowlais* gan yr arlunydd Cedric Morris (1936-9) yn arddangosol o'r cyfnod cyn-rhyfel, yng nghanol y dirwasgiad mawr, ac yn fy marn i yn un o'r weithiau diwydiannol gorau yn yr oriel Glynn Vivian, yn bresennol. Gwelir y peintiad yn yr arddangosfa o gasgliad CASW - Ddoe a Heddiw: 80 mlynedd o gasglu Celf Celfyddyd gyfoes Cymru.

Gellir dadlau bod y ddelwedd yn portreadu celf o'r gymuned yn lle diwydiant, ond eto'n pwysleisio pa mor allweddol roedd diwydiant i gymunedau Cymreig, a bod popeth yn cael ei rheoli gan gyflwr diwydiant a chyflog yn yr ardal. Mae'r safbwynt hon yn cael ei gefnogi gan Lord (1998, p.209), sydd yn datgan "Ni chafwyd yn narluniau Cedric Morris fwy nag awgrym cynnil o'r dichter a deimlai at yr amodau byw a fodolai yn y cymoedd".

Yn y paentiad mae bron fel pe bai'r arlunydd yn gwrthdaro yn erbyn cyfraniad ei deulu i ddiwydiant Cymru, ac fel canlyniad yr amodau byw erchyll roedd y gweithwyr yn wynebu. Gan roedd Cedric Morris disgynnydd i'r Baron Morris 1af o Claesmont, Sir Forgannwg a gwnaeth sefydlu'r gweithdy copr hynod lwyddiannus yn Nhreforys wnaeth cyfrannu'n fawr i'r tyfiant diwydiannol.

Mae Lord (1998, p.209), yn parhau i ddweud "er eu bod yn lluniau prudd a bortreadai dirwedd ddiwydiannol mud ac amhoblog, ni ellir eu hystyried yn rhan o ymdrech fwriadol i ddatblygu eiconograffig a oedd yn mynegi dioddefaint y cyfnod". Mae hyn yn amlygu'r nifer diweithdra ym Merthyr Tydfil a oedd yn sefyll ar 36 y cant tuag at ddiwedd 1937, pryd creodd Cedric Morris *The Tips Dowlais* (1936-9).



Dowlais from the Cinder Tips, 'Caeharris' by Cedric Morris
Courtesy of Cyfarthfa Museum and Art Gallery, Merthyr Tydfil. © the estate of the artist.

Mae'r paled lliw tywyll yn adlewyrchu naws y diobaith a achosodd y diweithdra cynyddol yn y blynyddoedd yn arwain at gynhyrchiad y paentiad gan Morris. Mae'r defnydd o baent olew trwchus yn ymylu ar arddull argraffiadol (Impressionistic). Gwelir hyn, yn enwedig, yn y blociau bychan o liw sy'n ail greu cerrig waliau'r tai, yn y defnydd eang o'r lliw brown tywyll ar waliau'r tai yn y blaendir, a hefyd rhubanau o lwyd golau'r llech sy'n addurno waliau'r capel naill ochr y ffenest.

Wrth sefydlu'r capel i godi yn uwch dros ben mwg ffwrnesi diwydiant y dref awgryma'r arlunydd, yn fy marn i, bod Duw a chrefydd yn goresgyn diwydiant a ffurfiau bodau dynol.

Yn ôl fy ymchwiliad (Artuk.org 1, 2019) cafodd y paentiad ei greu yn ystod adeg y dirwasgiad ym Merthyr Tydfil pryd caeodd y gwaith dur ac fel

canlyniad roedd llawer o'r trigolion yn ddioddef diweithdra. Roedd yr arlunydd yn gweithio yn Nowlais, ac yn cynnig gwersi mewn peintio a cherflunio i weithwyr er mwyn gwella'u bywydau yn ystod yr adeg anodd yma. Cafodd y paentiad *The Tips Dowlais* (Morris 1936-9) ei greu fel cydymaith i'r paentiad *Caeharris Post Office from Gwernlwyn House* (Morris, 1935) sy'n dangos golwg gwahanol o Ddowlais tua'r amser pan gaeodd y gwaith dur (Artuk.org 2, 2019). Mae'r ddau beintiad yma bron yn rhagweld dirywiad y diwydiant glo yn y dyfodol, gan fod yn cyfleu sut mae'r gymdeithas wedi dirywio o ganlyn i golled diwydiant, felly'r tirlun hefyd.

Rwyf wedi edmygu'r artist yma am amser maith ac mae *The Tips Dowlais* (Morris, 1936-9) yn esiampl wych o'i waith ac yn destament i'r bobl wnaeth byw trwy'r cyfnod anodd yma.

Llyfryddiaeth

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Mae Rhys Page yn fyfyrwr trydedd flwyddyn darlunio yng Ngholeg Celf Abertawe Prifysgol Cymru y Drindod Dewi Sant.

This article by Rhys Page third year Illustration student at Swansea College of Art UWTSD explores the industrial representation within Welsh art with a focus on Cedric Morris' The Tips Dowlais (1936-9) from the CASW Collection currently on display at the Glynn Vivian Gallery Then & Now: 80 Years of CASW, 9 Feb - 12 May 2019.

English Art Bored Me to Tears

The Life of Paule Vézelay

Kim Renfrew



'Britain's first abstract artist' is thought to be Ben Nicholson. However, the title could more properly be given to a Bristol-born woman, who was as amorphous as the shapes in her art. Painter, sculptor, etcher, illustrator, textile designer...even Paule Vézelay's name changed shape.

She was born Marjorie Watson-Williams in 1892, daughter of Dr Patrick Watson-Williams, a groundbreaking surgeon. After studying at Bristol School of Art, in 1911 she moved to London to attend the Slade. She did not stay there long, feeling restricted by the conventional classes and the emphasis on life-drawing. She left for the London School of Art, where she was taught by Punch cartoonist and etcher George Belcher. Under Belcher's tutelage she flourished, drawing scenes she observed around her and taking on her first professional commission during WWI: a series of bold black-and-white illustrations for *A Diary of the Great Warr*, a Pepys pastiche. She began exhibiting after

Left: Paule Vézelay in her studio, 1934: www.EnglandGallery.com/paule-vezelay

the war; a show at the Galerie Georges Giroux in Brussels in 1920 saw her travel down to Paris, the city that was soon to transform her art, life – and name. Later that same year she held a solo exhibition in the French capital: Exposition de M. Watson-Williams at the Galerie des Feuilletts d'Art.

Still living in London, Watson-Williams held her first London exhibition in 1921 and the following year was invited to join the London Group, the merging of the Camden Town Group and Vorticists, whose founding members included Ethel Sands, Nan Hope Hudson, Sickert, Epstein and Wyndham Lewis.

1926 was a turning point for Watson-Williams, artistically and personally: she moved to Paris: "English art then bored me to tears" she said, and "My sympathy was with art of today which really exists and lives at its best in Paris." The move was facilitated by an allowance from Dr Watson-Williams, who had always admired and encouraged his daughter's work. Watson-Williams inhabited the centre of the city's art scene: Picasso and Braque worked in the street next to her studio; she moved among and was influenced by the avant-garde: Gris, Kandinsky, Matisse, Miro, Mondrian. She became close friends with the Arps, Jean and Sophie, and lived with the Surrealist André Masson.

While in Paris, Marjorie became Paule Vézelay referencing an 11th-century church in the Burgundy town of the same name, and her artistic output also began shifting shape. She held a solo show at Paris' Galerie Alice Manteau in 1928, the year she dedicated her work wholly to abstraction. Her art became an exploration of 'living lines' using mixed media: wire, cotton and malleable, modern plastic on canvas. Arp encouraged her to experiment with sculpture in the 30s, lifting her lines from the canvas to fill three dimensions: the plaster sculpture *Five Forms* (1935) bends them into ovals, cones and tusks. In 1934, Vézelay's joined *Abstraction-Création*, a group of mainly neoplasticist, constructivist and concrete artists who formed an informal collective in 1931 to counteract the influence of Surrealism and which included Arp, Mondrian, Kandinsky, and founding member Van Doesberg. Vézelay's floating forms, often monochromatic or in muted browns, greens and oranges,



Worlds in Space 135/1974. Oil on Canvas. © Estate of Paule Vézelay, photograph courtesy England & Co gallery, London.

continued to be shown in Paris and internationally with continuing success until the Second World War broke out.

Vézelay, as a foreign national, left Paris to avoid possible internment and moved back into her parents' house in Rodney Place, Clifton. Back in the UK, she once again began making the scenes observed about her into art. Never an official war artist, thanks to the assistance of the Bristol Museum and Art Gallery, Vézelay was granted a permit to draw the devastation inflicted on Bristol: 100,000 buildings were destroyed there during WW2. *Damaged Steel Girders, Bristol, 1941* is instantly recognisable as a Vézelay, the twisted lines no longer formal spatial studies but lifelike renderings of the twisted remnants of a pulverised city. She also made a series of studies at the barrage balloon centre in her home city, observing that balloons, like paintings, were "full of air": these pastels and charcoals echo the biomorphic shapes seen elsewhere in her abstract work.

When the war ended, Vézelay returned to Paris, but the moment had passed and she did not prosper this time. Unable to afford a studio, she

moved back to London where she did not receive a great deal of recognition, in part because she was still identified so strongly with France but also because her work was still considered perhaps too modern for post-war London.

In the post-war years, Vézelay continued working, setting up a London chapter of Groupe Espace, the Parisian movement that strove to bring the ideals of neo-plasticism and constructivism into the lived environment, at the invitation of its founder Andre Bloc. The group was small, did not spark much interest among artists – Victor Pasmore, for one, refused to join – but it did hold a forward-looking exhibition at the Royal Festival Hall in 1955.

Vézelay morphed again during the 1950s, this time into a successful textile designer. She worked with high-end department stores around Europe, including Metz in Amsterdam and Heal's in London. Her floating shapes and lines lent themselves well to floating silk scarves and Vézelay worked with Ascher, the textiles company that used designs by contemporary artists, among them Henry Moore, Picasso and Cecil Beaton, founded by the Czech couple Zika and Lida Ascher.

Vézelay continued to work until her death in 1984. She sought recognition for the role she had played in the development of British abstraction and finally received it late in life, with a retrospective at the Tate in 1983. She was profiled in a 40-minute BBC documentary in the 'Women of our Century' series in 1984, the year she died (currently available on BBC iPlayer). Her creations are held in collections at the British Museum, Imperial War Museum, V&A, Ashmolean, Basel, Australian National Museum and of course, her home town of Bristol. Thirty five years after her death, interest has again piqued in Vézelay's pioneering work: the Tate held a small retrospective again in 2017, and she was included in the *Surface Work* show at the Victoria Miro last year.

Kim Renfrew is a Swansea-born, Bristol-based, writer and editor.



@FriendsGlynnViv

New Curator at the Helm



Photo: Polly Thomas 2018

Karen MacKinnon has been announced as the new curator of the Glynn Vivian Art Gallery, from her role as Director and Curator of internationally recognised contemporary arts body Artes Mundi. She replaces Jenni Spencer-Davies who has retired. Karen said: "I look forward to continuing the brilliant work of Jenni Spencer-Davies and the whole team. Working closely with colleagues in Swansea Council and the wider cultural networks, Arts Council Wales and local diverse communities and residents, we can further explore how art questions, inspires, connects and transforms our lives – and how the things it teaches us reverberate and are useful way beyond the walls of the gallery."

Forthcoming Events

6.30pm Thursday May 16

Landscapes in Steel: David Smith

Sarah Tombs

6.30pm Thursday June 6

Chapel of Hairy Flatness

Paul Emmanuel

Newsletter Articles:

The Friends welcome contributions. Please contact Louise Burston: friendsglynnviv@gmail.com for further information. Copy should be a word document and all images should be jpg or tiff format, 300dpi, with the appropriate copyright and captions.

This edition of the Newsletter was produced by Louise Burston and Kay Renfrew, and designed by Louise Burston.

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