
WALES

WALES'S PRESENCE AS COLLATERAL EVENT

Editor's note: Mr Cramerotti is the only writer in the Ideological Guide directly involved as co-curator in one of the – stateless – pavilions. He is thus asked to explore the guide as a method of self-critique

Wales is a devolved country within the United Kingdom. In Venice-Biennale-terms, this means Wales can only be presented as a Collateral Event rather than be re-presented as national pavilion. Only countries that are formally recognized by the Italian government can participate as official pavilions instead of collateral events. Being classified as a Collateral Event means that one has to re-apply with a specific project to each biennale, and there is no guarantee to be accepted. Although this is a pain for the Commissioner and organizational team, I also think it offers the possibility to 'refresh' the approach every time; to keep asking why it is important to have a pavilion in Venice, what one wants to say what and to whom. As a result the pavilions of countries that are in similar conditions (I can think of Scotland, of course, but also non-recognized 'states' such as Palestine, New Foundland, Catalonia and Tibet) are often sharper and more to the point, since their participation is not a given routine and every effort has to be made in order to bring social, cultural, political and economical significance to the project.

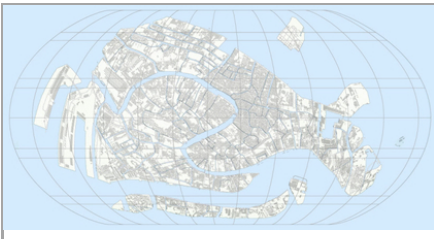
Wales's participation is financed by the Arts Council of Wales which in turn receives grants from the Welsh Government, itself settling its budget as part of the UK annual budget. In an effort to be fair and transparent, the Arts Council of Wales selects the artist and curators by issuing an open call. This year, however, the call was limited to the organizations that are part of the Visual Arts Galleries of Wales (VAGW), a network of publicly funded cultural institutions (disclosure: I am running a publicly funded art institution in Wales).

Wales has participated in the Venice Biennale since 2003. Having seen it previously from the outside, and having worked on it from the inside in this year's incarnation, I have witnessed its trajectory from being a cultural gesture in the wider art world often very suspicious of efforts to 'put something on the map', to consciously positioning itself as site for serious cultural production.

On one side, Wales's participation in the Venice Biennale is a 'vertical' initiative whose main aim *is* to put Wales on the map. For this purpose the budget not only allows the commission of new work, marketing and PR, but also the possibility to prepare and modify the space, and ultimately to make possible the artist's vision. On the other side, it is a rather 'horizontal' project in which the opportunity to re-present Wales is open to subjective interpretation and artistic and curatorial 'twists,' being able to accommodate a wide range of proposals to discuss, choose from, and negotiate with.

I want the Arts Council of Wales to continue pushing the boundaries of what a site for serious cultural production is – in Wales and elsewhere. An investment in the arts that wants to make an impact should not be limited by national boundaries in the choice of the artist or the curatorial proposal. This is not because Wales does, or should, not have a national identity, but rather because it should embrace artists and curators who are located outside Wales but have a practice linked with Wales. But at the same time those very boundaries allow and reflect the importance and relevance of culture for their respective government. To open up this question at every reiteration of the Venice Biennale could be the very 'border' distinguishing an official from a collateral pavilion, as well as give preference to the latter since a collateral pavilion has more leeway to question the very foundations of the project. As such the collateral event can be seen as an attempt to solve the conflict caused by the demand for self-determination of a nation-state people (however recognized it may be) with the productive reality of contemporary art in the current century. So, should this interesting conundrum of contrasting agendas, being in / of Wales and out / for Wales not best be kept 'in suspension,' so as *not* to be resolved once and for all?

Alfredo Cramerotti



PAVILION

ORGANIZER/COMMISSIONER:

Arts Council of Wales & Wales Arts International

ARTIST:

Bedwyr Williams

CURATORS:

Oriel Davies (gallery); MOSTYN (gallery)

OPEN CALL?

Yes

SELECTION PROCEDURE:

The open call is restricted to an invited list of galleries and visual arts organizations in the funded gallery sector in Wales in which Arts Council of Wales is already investing.

CURATOR

NAME:

MOSTYN (gallery)

NO. OF PARTICIPATIONS IN THE VENICE BIENNALE:

1

CURATOR

NAME:

Oriel Davies (gallery)

NO. OF PARTICIPATIONS IN THE VENICE BIENNALE:

1

ARTIST

NAME:

Bedwyr Williams

GENDER:

Male

BORN:

Wales, 1974

LIVES AND WORKS IN:

Wales

NO. OF PARTICIPATIONS IN THE VENICE BIENNALE:

2

REPRESENTED BY GALLERIES IN:

London

POLITICS & ECONOMICS

STATE SYSTEM:

Parliamentary country within the United Kingdom; a parliamentary constitutional monarchy

RULING POLITICAL PARTY:

Labour Party

POPULATION (WORLD BANK, 2011):

3,063,758

GDP PER CAPITA (WORLD BANK, 2011):

\$29,296

MILITARY EXPENDITURE (SIPRI, 2011):

No data

ALLIANCES

Commonwealth

CONFLICTS

COUNTRY INDEPENDENT SINCE:

Not independent

LAST MAJOR BORDER REVISION:

1707 (Formation of the Kingdom of Great Britain)

GLOBAL MITTARTIZATION INDEX (RIOC, 2011):

GLOBAL MILITARIZATION INDEX (GIMI, 2011).

No ranking

NUCLEAR FORCE?

No

ONGOING CONFLICTS AND DISPUTES:

Like Scotland, Wales gained considerable regional autonomy in the last decade. The wish for full independence is however less prominent, than in Scotland.