

WALES

BEDWYR WILLIAMS

THE STARRY MESSENGER

If a poet looks through a microscope or a telescope, he always sees the same thing.

- Gaston Bachelard

The Starry Messenger by Bedwyr Williams takes its name from a study published by Galileo Galilei about his discoveries through a telescope.

In a series of rooms and passageways at Santa Maria Ausiliatrice (Ludoteca) this new work ponders the leisurely exploration of space both infinite and minute. An amateur astronomer's clear night vigil or a worshipper's downward quest into the polished galaxies of the terrazzo floor below his shoes.

Home astronomers gaze into the depths of the universe and the beginning of time. People who sit in their back garden whilst their neighbours settle down for the evening. Lost in nebulae and tracking comets whilst eating biscuits and drinking tea from a flask. All around the world these amateur eyes consulting rotating charts are staring outwards as everyone else looks the other way.

Terrazzo born from the frugality of building on a lagoon is flapjack flooring. Millions of fragments, remnants from other people's jobs, churned and then spread on the ground and polished. A tutti-frutti of

glass and stone chips in a frozen, horizontal cross-section. What of the stones below them, the chips beneath the ones that we cannot see? In Williams' work, you are invited to imagine being one of these trapped flecks.

There's no noisy way of stargazing; the macro journey into a patterned floor is also a silent one.

Cymru yn Fenis/Wales in Venice is commissioned and managed by the Arts Council of Wales and Wales Arts International with support and collaboration from the Welsh Government and British Council.

Commissioner: Arts Council of Wales
Curators: MOSTYN and Oriel Davies.
Venue: Santa Maria Ausiliatrice (Ludoteca), Fondamenta San Giocacchin, (See page 10)
Dates: 1 June – 24 November 2013
Times: 10am-6pm (Closed Mondays)
Vaporetto: Giardini/Arsenale
Online: walesvenicebiennale.org.uk
facebook.com/WalesInVenice
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Image from 'The Starry Messenger' by Bedwyr Williams, designed by Åbåke. 2013

CYMRU YN FENIS
WALES IN VENICE



29 MAY 2013



BEDWYR WILLIAMS AND THE STARRY MESSENGER COLLATERAL EVENT OF THE 55TH INTERNATIONAL ART EXHIBITION LA BIENNALE DI VENEZIA

ORGANISED BY CYMRU YN FENIS WALES IN VENICE



Portrait by Dewi Glyn Jones, 2013

“The astronomer is stood in the window in a kind of half trance because he is getting a buzz from seeing his observatory with a starry night above it... So whilst he should be in there with his telescope, breathing through his nose chomping on the eyepiece with his baggy eye he’s actually getting some pleasure from looking at his hobby. The brochure he had thumbed for months showed a scene not unlike this. *This man is observing his observatory.*”

From ‘The Astronomer’ by Bedwyr Williams

Bedwyr Williams is the Welsh artist participating at the Wales in Venice Cymru Yn Fenis Collateral Event of the 55th International Art Exhibition, in a project jointly curated by MOSTYN and Oriol Davies and supported by the Arts Council of Wales. His exhibition, *The Starry Messenger*, explores the relationships between stargazing and the individual, the cosmos, and the role of the amateur in a professional world.

The Starry Messenger references Galileo’s short treatise, *Sidereus Nuncius (Starry Messenger)*, which was written in Venice and published in 1610 and detailed Galileo’s early observations of the Moon, the stars, and the moons of Jupiter, when he first looked through a telescope.

Housed in the Ludoteca Santa Maria Ausiliatrice, Venice, a church and former convent, its traditional terrazzo tiled floor – made up of tiny pieces of marble, quartz, granite and glass – sparked an initial idea for the exhibition:

“I thought about people staring into the terrazzo, which is like a universe made of tiny particles, and the people who had worshiped there. Maybe they stared into the floor and perhaps lost themselves in the particles, if say, they were bored at a sermon. And then I thought about Galileo, who presented his telescope to the Doge in Venice, which was the first place he showed it. In a church a telescope is a kind of “enemy” in a way. The church wouldn’t necessarily encourage you to look too far out of space, nor too much into inner space”.

This, together with an everyday human curiosity for looking up to the stars, has informed Williams’ inspiration for the installation: “I’m interested in people’s interests. There’s something extraordinary about people who stare at the cosmos through their domestic telescopes. People who play golf, or go to snooker halls have some kind of social standing, unlike star-gazers. But there’s nothing nerdy about looking at the universe. These are people with an absolute passion and it’s one of the few hobbies that is important for science: amateur astronomers spot comets because professionals are too busy to do the donkey work”.

The Starry Messenger begins by inviting visitors to enter a darkened room housing a model observatory. Birdsong and ambient noise evoke the contemplative atmosphere of a suburban garden at night. The sound of a man quietly weeping can also be heard.

Throughout the exhibition, visitors’ senses will be filled with the sights and sounds of a domesticated cosmos, as Williams draws on imagery from both the homely setting of the hobbyist and the unknowable universe at large, paying homage to the awe-struck amateur astronomer: “It’s good to know that while most of us are looking inwardly that there are some people around the world looking out”, says Williams.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Born in St Asaph in 1974, Bedwyr Williams lives and works in Caernarfon, North Wales. His comedic and poetic live performances and installations deal with Welshness, otherness and difference, regularly combining the everyday with the universal.

The artist’s work often draws upon the quirky banalities of his own autobiographic existence to develop his sculptures and performances. His work merges art and life with an idiosyncratic twist that is instantaneously sympathetic and relational. His sculpture, installations, text and photography based works and live performances explore subject matter ranging from growing up in Colwyn Bay with size 13 feet, to a mini bus crash with four other artists in residence (in which he is the only survivor). He has in the past assumed different personas in his work – a one-eyed preacher, the Grim Reaper and Count Pollen.

Bedwyr Williams’ work featured in the opening show at MOSTYN and in 2011 created a memorable installation in Oriel Davies of *Nimrod* – a piece first shown at Ceri Hand Gallery. Ikon and Glynn Vivian Art Gallery, in partnership with Mission Gallery, presented *My Bad* in Birmingham and Swansea in 2012. Ceri Hand Gallery represents Williams and launched a new solo show by the artist, *Dear Both*, in their new gallery in London, during Frieze London 2012. Williams also presented *Curator Cadaver Cake* as part of Frieze Projects, in association with Grizedale Arts. Conducting a live autopsy on a life-sized curator made from cake, complete with edible internal organs, it was one of the much talked about highlights of Frieze.

His work was also part of the Ceri Hand Gallery stand at the inaugural Art13 London international art fair in March 2013. Art13 London featured a dedicated performance booth designed by Bedwyr Williams, for which he also presented two performances.

Bedwyr Williams is a fitting choice for a challenging contemporary art arena such as the Venice Biennale. During the 2005 Biennale presentation of work in the space occupied by Wales in Venice on the Giudecca Island by Peter Finnemore, Paul Granjon, and Laura Ford in the exhibition *Somewhere Else*, Bedwyr Williams was awarded an artist placement commission by Cywaith Cymru Artworks Wales. This took place alongside the official exhibition as a complementary add-on. It led to a book and presentation on the Giudecca entitled BASTA, the Italian for “That’s Enough!”. BASTA was a rueful and wry reflection on the homesickness of the artist in residence.

Bedwyr Williams’ exhibition in Venice will be curated by two of Wales’s leading galleries; MOSTYN and Oriel Davies and will be shown in the Ludoteca, midway between the critical exhibition sites for the Biennale of the Giardini and the Arsenale. This is the second time Wales has shown at the Ludoteca.

Amanda Farr, Director, Oriel Davies, says: “Bedwyr truly epitomizes that very rare being – an artist whose vision and clarity of thought forces us to look at the world differently. I can think of no better artist at this moment and of our particular time to represent Wales in Venice.”

Alfredo Cramerotti, Director, MOSTYN, says: “Bedwyr is one of the artists of the moment. He brings himself to the forefront of a seemingly unsolvable puzzle – how to bridge, deal with and even solve the idea of the minor and the major, the particular and the universal.”

Dai Smith, Chair, Arts Council of Wales, concluded: “The Venice Biennale is the show that every artist wants to be in and every nation wants to be at. Bedwyr Williams is a significant artist for Wales with a growing international presence and we are pleased to present his work here. It’s really important that we build upon the fantastic profile which Wales has already established through a succession of collateral events at the Art Biennale. Working internationally is part of our core purpose as an Arts Council. Being here draws attention to the distinctive qualities of our visual arts scene which in turn play out well in this international arena.”

The exhibition is commissioned and managed by the Arts Council of Wales and Wales Arts International with support and collaboration from the Welsh Government and British Council.

OPENING TIMES

PREVIEW OPENING TIMES

29–31 May
Open: 10.00–19.00

GENERAL PUBLIC OPENING TIMES

1 June – 24 November
Open: 10.00–18.00

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NOTES TO EDITORS

Cymru yn Fenis Wales in Venice presents Bedwyr Williams and *The Starry Messenger*
Santa Maria Ausiliatrice (Ludoteca), Fondamenta San Giocchino, 30122 Venezia

MOSTYN

MOSTYN is the leading contemporary art gallery in Wales and receives financial support from the Arts Council of Wales, Conwy County Borough Council Art Services and Llandudno Town Council. Its recent new build and refurbishment has won many plaudits. It is key partner of Plus Tate network of the twenty most dynamic contemporary art galleries in the UK. MOSTYN programmes have recently included a show of David Nash exploring for the first time the role of colour in his work. Director Alfredo Cramerotti previously curated Manifesta 8, the European Biennial of Contemporary Art, Region of Murcia, Spain and All That Fits: The Aesthetic of Journalism. www.mostyn.org

ORIEL DAVIES

Oriel Davies is a key contemporary gallery of Wales and the principal visual arts venue for the mid Wales and the Welsh Borders region. From this highly rural setting the gallery initiates exhibitions of world-class art by national and international artists. Recent and forthcoming projects include solo shows with Helen Sear, Paul Granjon, Melanie Manchot, and Sharmila Samant. Director, Amanda Farr has led the gallery since 1998. Oriel Davies is supported by the Arts Council of Wales and Powys County Council. www.oriel Davies.org

CERI HAND GALLERY

Ceri Hand Gallery is a commercial contemporary art gallery established in Liverpool in 2008, which recently relocated to London. The Gallery represents a selection of the best emerging and mid-career artists, with a special focus on conceptual and performance art, producing and exhibiting major new works on and offsite. www.cerihand.co.uk

ARTS COUNCIL OF WALES

Arts Council of Wales is the country's funding and development agency for the arts. Its vision is of a creative Wales where the arts are central to the life of the nation and to ensure that the contribution of the arts is recognised, valued and celebrated. The Arts Council of Wales has commissioned artists to present at Cymru yn Fenis / Wales in Venice as a Collateral Event at the Venice Biennale since 2003, celebrating the best of emerging and established artists from Wales. www.artswales.org

FURTHER INFORMATION

For Bedwyr Williams see www.bedwyrwilliams.com

For the 55th International Art Exhibition, which takes place from 1 June – 24 November 2013 (previews on 29, 30, 31 May), see www.labiennale.org/en/art/index

With grateful thanks to Zabłudowicz Collection, Penderyn and Castle Fine Arts Foundry.

CYMRU YN FENIS
WALES IN VENICE

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MOSTYN



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