

Art and Poetry Exhibition

Dim Gobaith Caneri (Welsh idioms and phrases)

Thanks to a grant from the Arts Council of Wales, a poet and a painter from Merthyr Tydfil have created a collaborative exhibition which has been touring Wales. The exhibition by poet and author Mike Jenkins and painter Michael Gustavius Payne, began in their home town at Cyfarthfa Castle before visiting the Museum of Modern Art Wales in Machynlleth. The exhibition will now be visiting the Washington Gallery in Penarth during February (until 27th) before finishing off in Fishguard's West Wales Arts Centre. The exhibition at the Washington Gallery will include additional large paintings due to increased space.

The exhibition, titled "Dim Gobaith Caneri", meaning "no hope like a canary", includes paintings together with prose-poetry on the walls from a prose-poetry and micro-fiction booklet also available at the exhibition. The theme of the exhibition uses ideas inspired by traditional Welsh idioms and phrases to explore issues relevant to Wales and the world today. The artists have responded to each exhibition space independently when considering how to hang the work best. Previous exhibitions have used various extracted lines from Mike Jenkins's text on the walls, along-side MG Payne's paintings. For the next exhibition however, only one of Jenkins' prose-poems will be used but in its entirety. And rather than being placed onto the walls along-side the paintings, the text will be placed along ceiling beams that run through the Washington Gallery's upper gallery space. Payne explains that "making the most out of the space each gallery has to offer is very important. The ceiling beams in the Washington Gallery are ideal, they allow Mike's prose-poetry to exist in a space surrounded by all the paintings, rather than being associated with only one in particular. The text has a relationship with the whole exhibition rather than to one individual painting." Jenkins adds "we always intended the prose-poetry and micro-fiction to work together with the painting, rather than one art form being a response to the other. The paintings are not illustrations of the text and the prose-poetry and micro-fiction are not descriptions of the images".

The initial concept for the project began at an Open Mic Poetry Night in Merthyr Tydfil during 2009, the poet and painter discussed, and decided to develop a collaborative project. Both have lived in Merthyr for over 30 years, with a similar political ideology and views on the Welsh language. Payne explained that "our general motivation already seemed quite similar but we decided that this new work would also need a specific focus. We chose something that we'd both grown up alongside, being both very familiar with its sounds and heritage but also continually new and vibrant in words and imagery; something we both have a strong interest in. We decided to use Welsh idioms and phrases as a binding link between our work". Both artists came from English language backgrounds in Wales but decided to learn the Welsh language and send their children through Welsh medium education.

The overall theme of the exhibition is emphasised by its title: Dim Gobaith Caneri; no hope like a canary. The idiom refers to the old mining practice where canaries were once taken into mines as an early warning system, to alert miners of the presence of toxic gases. If the canary dropped down dead it would alert the miners. The references to the Valleys and coal mining in particular is obvious but the use of various Welsh language idioms and other details also give the exhibition a Wales wide focus, in a global context: bankers profits, ecology, the use of fossil fuels, etc. are all questioned within an exploration of the theme Dim Gobaith Caneri. Jenkins explains that "in the current global economic circumstances we could see a clear parallel: the canary could be seen to represent the continuing struggle and oppression of many people, while those that caused the crisis; namely the bankers, are allowed a free rein by the Government, and are still thriving with their bonus culture." The presence of animals and birds in a number of Welsh idioms has also inspired a consideration of nature and the planet in the exhibition. Payne elaborates; "the manner in which human-beings exploit the planet, also refers back to the Dim Gobaith Caneri idea. The canary represents nature and is portrayed as a victim predominantly but then the coal and the mountain also represent nature in the wider context. The symbolic significance of the coal or the mountain is ambiguous. Just like real life, we don't always know what the full consequences of our actions will be: Our long term actions could be disastrous for us but the mountain will still remain".

Dim Gobaith Caneri by Mike Jenkins

I am the No Hope Canary, singing in the deepest gallery. Below vaults of borrowed money. Trees rot eventually, become coal. But what of these notes; surely they will explode. These last years I have sung and people say – 'Listen how tunefully!' They do not hear truly. If they did, they would find a seam of sorrow there. I am left in my cage: no up and down. My beak a useless tool against iron. Dim.....the lights are leaving. Who will listen, even when I stop my singing? *Gobaith* has shine, but here the only gleam's on damp rock. The seep of gas from above, from those vaults: the steep banks of paper carcasses. I am the No Hope Canary, dumb in the deepest gallery.

Remaining Tour Dates:

The Washington Gallery in Penarth; 1st – 27th February, 2012.

The West Wales Arts Centre; 17th March – 14th April 2012.

Links:

Mike Jenkins' website: www.mikejenkins.net

MG Payne's website: mgpayne.com

Mike Jenkins' biography on Literature Wales: www.literaturewales.org/writers-of-wales/i/129703/

Pictures Jpeg versions and more images are available direct from MG Payne (contact form available on website mgpayne.com)



Mike Jenkins (left) and MG Payne (right) at Ffos Y Fran opencast mine.



MG Payne - Heb Flewin Ar Dafod

(Without a hair on the tongue/Talking straight) - Charcoal on paper - 69x86cm.



MG Payne - Allan O'r Cwd (Out of the bag) - Oil on canvas - 106x91cm.



MG Payne – Tipyn O Dderyn (A bit of a bird/lad) - Oil on canvas - 81x91cm.