

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 are bringing a collaborative exhibition to four art galleries throughout Wales in 2011 and 2012, beginning in their home town at Cyfarthfa Castle Museum and Art Gallery, throughout August, before moving onto the Museum of Modern Art Wales in Machynlleth during September and October. The exhibition continues in 2012 at the Washington Gallery in Penarth during February, ending at the West Wales Arts Centre in March and April 2012.

The exhibition, titled "Dim Gobaith Caneri", meaning "no hope like a canary" uses ideas inspired by traditional Welsh idioms and phrases to explore themes relevant to Wales and the world today, in a modern context.

At an Open Mic Poetry Night in Merthyr Tydfil during 2009, author and poet Mike Jenkins and painter Michael Gustavius Payne discussed, and decided to develop a collaborative project. Both have lived in the town for over 30 years, with a similar political ideology and both are also continuing to improve their Welsh language skills (both coming from English language backgrounds with similar views about the Welsh language). Michael Gustavius Payne, or Gus as most people in Merthyr know him, explains 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".

The overall theme of the exhibition is emphasised by its title: Dim Gobaith Caneri; no hope like a canary, which 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. The canary would drop down dead but this would alert the miners who could then escape the same fate. The references to the Valleys in particular is evident but the use of various Welsh language idioms and other details also gives 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.

Payne explains that "even though we have used many different idiom titles, the general theme Dim Gobaith Caneri runs through the whole series. The canary idea is a representation of the little guy, a seemingly expendable cog within a vast machine". With a specific reference to the banking crisis, Jenkins goes on to say 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 Gobaiith 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 consequences of our actions will be?”

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:

L-R: Mike Jenkins and MG Payne

Painting: Allan o’r cwd (Out of the bag)

