

# Elfyn Lewis

## *Nesa Peth i Ddim*



Walking into an exhibition of new paintings by Elfyn Lewis is always an exciting prospect and stepping into this collection of recent work at Plas Glyn-y-Weddw is no exception. An artist who pushes himself and his craft forward, he has created a new group of images that are pleasing in their entirety but his masterful feat is that individual pieces are like gems, guiding and drawing you from one to the other. The eye discovers the wonder, whether it's a subtle line or a splash of colour, allowing us to see and shape our own perceptions and responses.

Working intuitively, Lewis has cut a vital furrow in the Welsh art world earning his right to be counted among the most prominent of our artists. He follows his heart in creating the abstract images, each layer of paint and every gestural mark coming from the depths of his subconscious with the influence of his home area, his upbringing and his Welshness coming to the fore as we find elements of landscape or notice the purposeful titles that he gives to each piece. If we look carefully, we see Wales lurking in every image.

Originally from Porthmadog, Rob Piercy, his art teacher at Ysgol Eifionydd, was an early influence and inspiration as Lewis discovered his love of expressing himself through art. He was thrilled to find out that visionary artists such as J M W Turner had come to the area to paint and as a young artist he adopted the habit of going out in his locality to draw – even though his friends would tease him about this at the time! An early sign of his diligence was that he followed his instinct and went to Coleg Menai in Bangor to pursue an Arts Foundation course. The late Peter Prendergast was one of his tutors there and after three months Lewis knew for sure that he wanted to follow a painting degree. Although his canvases of the mountains above his home in Bethesda were colorful and free, Prendergast was a fairly strict teacher and Lewis is thankful that he helped him foster a work ethic that has enabled him to come to terms with life as an artist, who, like to any creative person making a living through his or her own craft, can suffer a lonely existence at times.

Preston in Lancashire was the next step on his journey to follow a Fine Art Degree before moving home to Port and then settling in Cardiff at the beginning of the nineties to try to establish his career as an artist and experiencing at first hand the importance of having a strong work ethic. His work was included in group shows in Cardiff and Edinburgh and his images were seen on record covers for bands such as Catatonia and Big Leaves as well as featuring on many Parthian book covers. He was part of a seminal site-specific project with fellow artist Peter Finnemore at the National Eisteddfod of Wales, Llanelli in 2000 and soon there were individual exhibitions in Cardiff and Oriel Môn amongst others followed by the wonderful successes in winning the Gold Medal for Fine Art at the National Eisteddfod of Wales, Bala in 2009 and the Welsh Artist of the Year at St David's Hall, Cardiff in 2010. The same year his work was selected for inclusion in the prestigious re-opening exhibition at Oriel Mostyn that celebrated the diversity and richness of Welsh art. Since then Lewis has continued to exhibit consistently in Wales and beyond and we are delighted to present a collection of his new work at this wonderful gallery space at Plas Glyn-y-Weddw.

The timing of this exhibition however means that Lewis has gone through intense experiences - of happiness and sadness - while preparing the collection. In the same gallery space last October we had been very fortunate to show some of the amazing huge colorful canvasses of the late Gillian Ayres, one of Lewis' art heroes. Lewis was thrilled by the exhibition and met and chatted with Sam, Gillian's son, and hearing that Ayres had enjoyed seeing Lewis' work in a booklet that he had sent her as a gift. From seeing those huge canvases at Plas, Lewis has ventured to work on a larger scale and the same free passion as it witnessed in Ayres' work can be seen in *Diwedd y Byd*, *Yn y Diwedd* and *Croesor Uchaf*.

These titles, together with the exhibition title\*, are a key to another element that had an intense impact on Lewis in recent months - losing his friend, playwright, author and actor Meic Povey. Like Lewis, Povey had settled in Cardiff but the bulk of his creative work was deeply rooted in Nant Gwynant and Garndolbenmaen areas where he was raised. Povey was a hero to the young artist who was trying to make his creative mark and meeting and becoming friends with him had an influence on Lewis. Like Lewis, diligence and a strong work ethic was extremely important to Povey as an author and the artist admired the self-confidence and assurance he showed as he excavated childhood memories for raw material in powerful works with an universal relevance. Here was a man who Lewis was able to turn to for inspiration and gave him faith to follow his instinct and not to be afraid to express his feelings through paint towards his family, his Welshness and his country - the things that mattered to him.

We will have a special discussion at 2pm on Sunday July 8<sup>th</sup> when we will be exploring the influence of birthplace and upbringing in the company of the artist with Guto Williams (a television director who made a documentary about Lewis); Angharad Price (Welsh author who has written about T H Parry Williams and his travels); Carwyn Jones (became known as 'Y Dyn Gwyllt' (The Wild Man) on S4C; Michael Sparks (a Scotsman who has fallen in love with Wales and settled down here) and Branwen Cennard (author and producer who worked closely with Meic Povey on several television productions)

Entry will be free but please ring or email to reserve a place 01758 740763 / [enquiry@oriel.org.uk](mailto:enquiry@oriel.org.uk)

*Collectorplan*, the Arts Council of Wales interest free credit scheme, is available for all purchases in this exhibition.

\* titles of Meic Povey works and autobiography