

Retake Reinvent

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RE-TAKE/RE-INVENT

Engaging Studio Practice for Learning: New Art from Past Art

Re-take, Re-invent is a group exhibition project featuring 16 artists responding to the art collection at the National Museum of Wales, Cardiff. The artists, all living and working in rural North Wales, have been interpreting chosen art works in the collection from the critical standpoint of their current studio practice developing new ideas and creating journeys of practice based thinking as each finds different ways to connect with content and meaning in the art works in relation to their own artistic agendas. Artists were free to connect with any work in the art collection and following a group visit in December 2014 each embarked on a new series of work.

As a project initiated by the fine art programme at Bangor University, Re-take, Re-invent has been taking place for 18 months allowing an extended time to focus specifically on the process of making. How creative individuals approach an art collection or museum as a starting point for new work is the central concern with this project. As a result, many artists have chosen works that question paradigm in their practice and establishing pathways for production has proved challenging, raising issues confronting familiar patterns of making. Previous similar projects have initiated the making of one new artwork in response to a collection or even artists matching existing studio work with an item. This project focuses on the method of creative thinking in the reinterpretation and construction of new art in relation to extended thinking over subject and meaning. It highlights sketches, studies and work books as well as finished art works. Interestingly, many of the artists have chosen contemporaries or near contemporaries to work from, rather than the conventional historical example of a typical transcription project.

Marged Pendrell has chosen to work with Richard Long a near contemporary, and Noelle Griffiths chose John Hoyland, a recent major figure of British abstract painting. Pendrell is questioning approaches to working with the landscape and has embarked on a new dimension of political agenda in her work with walking the perimeter of the National Park boundary around Blaenau Ffestiniog. Griffiths is re-evaluating her practice and interest in abstraction with reference to Hoyland who was a major proponent of abstraction when she was a student in the early 1980s. The re-evaluation of his work after nearly four decades has led Griffiths to create a series of artists books, whilst notionally referencing Hoyland's art, these have specifically referenced his quotes on the nature of making as part of the new work. In many ways this acts a signifier for the project as a whole. The reinterpretation of previous art works in collections by contemporary practitioners is an essential ingredient in keeping a given collection relevant and current to new audiences. Another dimension to this enquiry is the possibility of engaging with studio practice. During the project, interested groups and non-participatory artists have visited studios and collaborated on secondary projects. Moreover, a formal element of the project initiated three main school workshops that have focused on the work of participating artists early on during the time of production, engaging with the studio process rather than a completed art exhibition (at the time of writing the exhibitions have yet to take place).

The project enlisted specialist facilitator Rebecca Hardy Griffith to work with primary school children in three separate schools in the region, Ysgol Yr Hendre, Caernarfon; Ysgol Pen y Bryn, Conwy; and Ysgol Y Graig, Llangefni and to look at three different participating artists (near to each School) encouraging engagement with the process that the artists had utilised in producing new work from the art work in the collection. The workshop artists were Iwan Lewis (David

Jones); Andrew Smith (Thomas Jones) and Steffan Jones Hughes (Francesco Guardi). Each workshop took place over two days with the first session looking closely at the artist's practice then, secondly the artists' choice from the collection and how they were interpreting them. The students were then able to engage with a methodology of actual studio practice via looking at examples supplied through blogs of ongoing works and then looking at the collection work and seeing how the artist was interpreting the chosen work. The engagement was through practical workshops with drawing, painting and printmaking by group and individual work, underpinned by rigorous questions where students were encouraged to recall factual knowledge and process. Specifically the questions asked students to recall the participating artist, process being used, the work from the collection, and the museum, identifying Cardiff geographically and culturally. Connections were established between the museum's collections and the instigation of new creative work.

In addition, a selection of the artworks made by the students in the workshops will be shown alongside the participating artists' work with a reproduction of each art work from the collection in Storiol Museum and Art Gallery, Bangor, one of the three project exhibition venues. Whilst this exhibition will be 14 months after the workshops the project has been designed so that the students will not have progressed to secondary school at this time and will be able to visit the exhibition and recall the project. This will further emphasise how the reinterpretation of work can itself be part of a strategy for the making and production of new work; the school workshops as a process of creative thinking and learning are given status by occupying one of the three main venues furthering the connection between the artist's approach and the student's own creative interpretation. Whilst clearly being a highly effective strategy in rural regions such as North West Wales, the precedent of learning through engagement with studio practice is equally valid in urban centres for the reinterpretation of museum collections as active creative resources for the development of new creative ideas.

The Re-take, Re-invent project schools workshops focused on the museum as a resource for creative ideas by means of engaging with the artist's studio and process as an exploratory entity. Instead of engaging with art works in the collection on site and by interacting with contemporary artist interpretations, the students learn from working with and alongside the process of creative thinking.