

## BARN REVIEW Oriel lockdown by Robyn Tomos ( English )

The exhibition in Aberystwyth that includes nearly 400 artworks responding to the pandemic is 'open' in the true sense, says our reviewer. Realizing the concept is the excellence of the 'Lockdown Gallery' exhibition at Aberystwyth Arts Centre.

While the Centre's galleries were closed during the first lockdown last year, staff speculated on how people were coping with having to live under the siege of Covid-19. As a result, with a view to reopening in the future, it was decided to call for artwork in response to the situation.

Artists from all over were invited to a river of work relating to any aspect of the pandemic - from the virus and illness, self-isolation and changing the world, to the individual's experience, the neighbourhood and the world. And there was a greatness in the medium and size of the work.

By 10 August 2020 over 1,000 applications had been received via Twitter and Instagram mass media and by email. How to select and create an exhibition of the whole was the challenge faced by Ffion Rhys, the Centre's Curator of Exhibitions, and Anthony Shapland, Creative Director of the g39 artists' centre, Cardiff. According to both, such a response was a clear demonstration of the role that art has in people's lives. For some, creative activity was vital to their well-being. For others, the still was an unparalleled and valuable opportunity to get on with their work. But what struck the selectors were the stories that backed up so many of the attempts. It was decided not to differentiate between the professional and the amateur when selecting works by 160 artists. As individual works and series of works, nearly 400 pieces of art were selected.

This is an open exhibition in the true sense of the word. A democratic show. And despite the effort by the curators to follow themes, the range of media and styles is astonishing.

A 'Social Distance Ball' which greets the visitor at the centre entrance. The ball, which is two meters across with the black and yellow commands to keep a proper distance, is proof that humour is a useful tool in facing the distress of the pandemic. Artist Geraint Edwards can climb into the ball and roll in it. (Stickers were made by another artist.) And if it's the retraining of skills or just going for it that motivated some leisure-time artists, the threat to livelihood was at the forefront of Paul Rowlands, who created a tableau titled / Death of the Economy ' - a one pound funeral on a piece of toast.

As one would expect, portraits of masked and rainbow-wearing people are a recognition of the contribution of Health Service employees along with photographs of a quiet motorway, empty high street and ambulance glimpses through loft curtains.

Sianed Jones has taken pictures of the changing murals on her backyard wall that chronicle the lockdown and Lily Lacey - Hastings created an exhibition of postcards she received from artists around the world - portraits and landscapes wanting the best for it. Warm memories in solitude.

It is likely that some established artists took the opportunity to complete work that had been in progress for some time. The largest piece in the exhibition is a charcoal and tunnel drawing of a tunnel - based on photographs taken by Alice Forward in the lead mines of Cwm Rheidol and Cwmystwyth at the start of the lockdown. Is there finally light? Suddenly work had a new investment, he said. Similarly, another huge black and white photograph of a lonely hawthorn whipped by the wind is another 'pest;' Mike Perry's Work refers to the destruction of our hedgerows and our surroundings more generally. If human indifference was responsible for the infection, our actions are already ruining our world.

Although the doors of the large museums and galleries were locked, it was still possible to search for inspiration in the work of the old masters. Dorry Spikes browsed the digital archive of the National Gallery, London, and Velásquez's work. She was able to benefit from working on a larger scale by copying the masterpiece 'The Tela Real' far more than she could have done in the gallery itself. In the context of C-19 the new interpretation of the boar hunting scene and the sense of restriction strikes twelve.

There is a small group of simple illustrators - rarely seen by the visitor - there is an image of two babies in a hospital intensive care cradle. In another photo in the same series we see a fridge full of baby milk bottles. Here's what sparked the imagination. What's this story about? Did your artist, Sorsha Williams, have given birth to the twin twins and had to leave the newborn in the care of the hospital? And if so, did creating the illustrations alleviate some of that?

As is typical of such shows, the works are often placed one on top of the other by double or triple hanging. There is one small picture by Mari Elin that is almost warning of how Covid has caused a new influx into the countryside. As a new wave of people come to buy property in Ceredigion - often online without visiting the place - the pale photo that was inspired.