

Comments on Field-notes. A collaborative exhibition; Iwan Bala and poet Menna Elfyn. Oriol Myrddin, Carmarthen, Wexford Arts Centre, Ireland, National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth.

'The value of this kind of art is that it utilizes one of the great underdeveloped areas of human potential: thought and understanding, using drawing not primarily as description or expression, nor as documentation, representation or recording, but rather as a conduit of understanding. This is what I would call 'graphic rhetoric': a multi-layered explanation of complex ideas that become accessible to the viewer from the moment of first contact. The notebooks contain a forensic sense of scrutiny, of measured deliberation. Words inform the image in a coming together of an ancient tradition where words create imagery, with more contemporary practices of integrating word and image. Poems leave the page and join the visual world, a remarkable example being, *Nam Lleferydd/Speech Impediment*. Here there is no discernible image, apart from that formed by the artist as he draws the poet's words – and draw them he does, he does not write them'.

'The past may well be another country, a place we can never revisit, and as anthropologist James T. Clifford argues 'There is no return for anyone to their native land, only field-notes for it's reinvention'. Clifford's aphorism has for a long time been one of the driving forces behind Iwan Bala's creative output, and it is from this phrase that the exhibition (and current work) takes it's title. Bala sees himself as a field-worker, one engaged in an examination of his own culture. He recognizes that the place he left behind exists only in his reconstructed memories, which are as unreliable as all memories tend to be. Bala accepts the reality of the situation that he finds himself in, there is no easy appeal to a nostalgic romanticism'.

' But, seeking a means of visualizing what he feels has been lost and can never be regained, his original painterly instincts have been over-ridden by an often quite savage graphic intensity that has seen his recent work turn into a vivid tirade against the casual forgetfulness of cultural degradation. His boyhood love of maps – actual and fictitious – was followed by him beginning a degree in geography, which was soon abandoned to pursue his long-held ambitions to be a fine artist. Unsurprisingly, geography is his starting point. Maps are a dominant visual theme, and a means of placing complicated multi-dimensional notions in an easily readable form'.

'Both Iwan Bala and Menna Elfyn operate as poetic entomologists, collecting specimens that only exist as inchoate forms of their innermost imaginings. The image or poem comes into being from a desire: a desire to record. Preserve, commemorate and celebrate. The drawings are framed to give them the air of trophies, carrying an almost museum-like feeling of something elusive, rare and delicate – something whose very existence is threatened. The underlying colour of the work is faded sepia; and the earthy, roughly textured paper gives an archaeological quality to the image. They look as though they have been unearthed rather than drawn'.

Extracts from; *Can you tell me the way to Windsor* in Planet, The Welsh Internationalist 207, p 97. August 2012 by Osi Rhys Osmond.