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Jenő Davies and Iolo Walker in conversation with Sim Panaser, Curator of Visual Art, June 2025.

The works in the exhibition have been born out of a return to Wales, specifically Machynlleth, Powys, where you live and work. How has rurality shaped your practices and this body of work?

Jenő: I grew up in an isolated pocket of Carmarthenshire. The bowl-like valley was a whole world, a microcosm holding a set of characters, creatures and contours, life and death, coexistence and conflict. I think this experience has significantly influenced my approach to artmaking. I feel compelled to make work in a rural context because I think that it holds so many questions, contradictions as well as familiarity and solace.

Iolo: I grew up in East London, the city influences me a lot. At some point I got sick, wanted to return to Wales to process some grief. Most my family have now moved back to Wales. Environment has always been a big influence in my work; I seem to gravitate to the water. I enjoy rurality's direct experience of seasons. Skyscrapers don't shed their leaves.

Tell us about the significance of the title which brings two ideas together – a palisade, a wooden barricade and the flower meadowsweet.

Iolo: We wanted to create a form of fortification that feels like the walls of a house or enclosure that's caught somewhere in between an invitation to cross a threshold and warding off perceived threats with cats and other familiars keeping watch. Our previous work has borrowed from direct action methodologies, land occupations, workshops, guerilla cinema. We were toying with the idea of blockades in the show. Countrysides have this saccharised identity, used to uphold perceptions of nationalism, race and class. Meadowsweet is a reference to Y Mabinogi and Blodeuwedd, who is made from flowers including meadowsweet.

Your film Pinwydd is a new retelling of the Welsh myth of Blodeuwedd. Using tropes from fantasy, sci-fi storytelling and cinema you've created a universe that speaks to hopes and desires for better worlds. Your film imagines alternatives to capitalism, and this is also mirrored in its making. Can you tell us more about the politics of your worldbuilding, and your DIY approach to making this film?

Iolo: I began thinking through ideas of hyper objects, trans-dimensional objects that have millions of representations, such as petrochemicals, climate change, plastics. We wanted to create characters that became allegorical representations of these objects. So, we settled for Mr Candy, our neomedieval capitalist allegory, war with Blod, and our crop characters Oen (animal husbandry, meat) and Pin (forestry, timber).

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Cinema is often produced hierarchically, and we struggled to find films produced in more horizontal structures. We wanted to produce a film that had ecological, social and historical, mythological benefits. We developed the story through workshops, reading Donna Haraway's *The Camille Stories*, various essays on themes of transmutations within the Mabinogi and walking tours through the spruce plantations in West Powys. We also worked with local youth centred film cooperative clwb ffideo and Stiwdio Dyfi.

Jenő: I've always been into popular fantasy and historical fiction, particularly on screen. As much as I enjoy it, I'm also interested in interrogating how these stories manipulate and maintain representations of a past to uphold certain hegemonies into the future so effectively. I wanted to use fantasy tropes as a framework to present counter narratives that propose alternative futures. Through the filmmaking process itself these hypotheticals became tangible experiences through workshops and connections with a network of young rural creatives.

For me, there's a sense of collecting and preservation, an importance of keeping and holding that is felt across many of the works in the show. Jenő, your dioramas evoke an archive.

What was your approach to amassing and making this collection?

Jenő: Collecting objects, materials and images blurs the line between my daily experience and my creative output. I wanted to show an assemblage that combined my own models, experiments and found images. These objects sit on a hand-pulled car that moralises the collection through time and place. I don't own a car, so I often find myself carrying or wheeling objects and materials to and from the studio. The cart itself is as much a practical object as it is a sculptural one.

Tell us more about the music and sounds we hear in the installation, 'Thalia' / 'Katniss'.

Iolo: It takes a selection of excerpts from a series of radio shows done on Radio Dyfi, alongside some field recordings and me singing. They're played through my domestic bedroom speakers and some plaster conches. Field recordings of the sea, insides of shells, create a base from where to approach the melancholy of processing death. The songs and excerpts are from some radio shows of me working through the Spotify playlist of a friend who passed away. They cover various themes of dysphoria, transness and self-harm. In *Is My Team Ploughing*, the vocalist sings call-and-response between the living and his buried lover and friend beneath him. It felt pertinent as homo-necrotic conversation between the living and the dead. The bedroom becomes the dismembered shore.

I was living in London, and post death I began to struggle with the height of the city. The tall buildings I walked under morphed into these oppressive thumbs that could squish people out of life. There's a difference in being humbled by sublimines of different makers. The sea and mountains equally have this humbling power, but it's like, Capitalocene or Palaeozoic humility. I found the latter more fulfilling. So, I kind of came back to Wales for that.

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Watchtower speaks of concealment, invisibility and protection, referencing First World War observation posts that were made to look like replica trees. On a different scale your dioramas also play with the real and abstract. Can you tell us more about your interest in this inbetween-ness?

Jenő: I guess in between-ness can only be identified when fixed points of reference can be agreed upon. But what is really fixed? Windows of acceptability slide, landscapes shift, nature is hard to define and representation becomes reality. With Watchtower I was drawn to the idea of theatrical scenery or artificial trees becoming part of the landscape, and the brutality of conflict. I was also drawn to what feels like an old instinct to hide in a hollow tree.

This exhibition was conceived collaboratively from the start. How have you found the process of making a show together?

Jenő: We approach shared interests and themes with very different skillsets. Iolo's digital literacy, creative impulses and go-getter-ness has challenged me to be more ambitious and happier to take risks. Over the course of the project, we've developed a lot together I think as artists and friends. We've had a lot of similar but also very oppositional experiences – Iolo, growing up in East London and me in rural Wales. I think this dialogue is really apparent in our collaborative output. I wouldn't have done it with anyone else!

Iolo: Working with Jenő has been exciting as we've motivated and upheld each other to make more expansive and ambitious work. Collaboration can be tricky as we have different visions. I'm still a bit too close to the project to reflect properly but we've spent a lot of time together over the past year! We've had our moments but ultimately share vision and aspirations and have been able to find resolution. I'm very grateful to have shared this opportunity with the talented artist and terrific friend.