

Welcome to the February Newsletter. Soon we will be moving back to our more regular activities, demonstrations, workshops, exhibitions etc. and you can look forward to an exciting programme which includes life drawing, traditional painting, abstract watercolour, collaborative painting, landscapes, botanicals, gilding and batik - something for everyone.

By the middle of March you will have received everything you need to renew your membership, see what is forthcoming and to start booking workshops. You will receive everything by post and we hope to see all our members back from April. In future quarterly newsletters will take on a different format, reflecting what is going on in our workshops, demonstrations and any other activities organised this year. But for this month, and next month, you can continue to enjoy the current format. Here is the main article written by Paul Barrett, on Welsh artist, Charles Burton.

A recent exhibition of work by Charles Burton at the Oriel Myrddin Gallery in Carmarthen featured examples of three of his major themes - portraits, interiors usually featuring chairs, and the valley landscapes of the South Wales. The latter are the focus of my interest and this article.

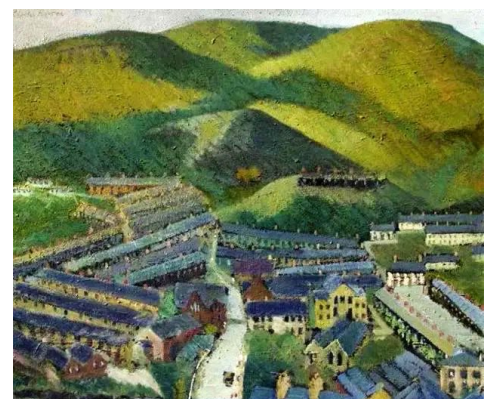
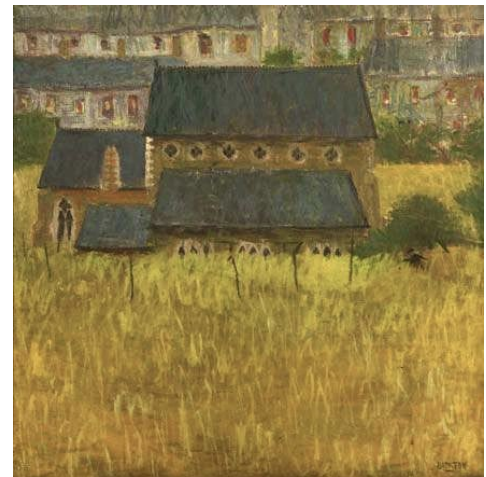
For six decades Charles Burton has been one of the major figures of art in Wales. Born in 1929, he grew up amid the poverty of the pre-war Rhondda Valley. He was one of the Rhondda School of artists trained at Cardiff. Subsequently he also taught art and was head of painting at Liverpool College of Art at the time when John Lennon was a student, while from 1970 he was head of art and design at the Polytechnic of Wales until his retirement.

There were five landscape paintings in the exhibition which reflected both his consuming interest in the social and physical landscape and the changing response to its depiction over his lifetime. "I simply had a mantra of finding gold in my own back yard, and painted what I knew"

His early painting 'Coal train in the Rhondda' (circa 1950) with its muted tones displays both simplicity, and a direct, immediate and unpretentious response to the valley environment seen every day on his journey to art college. The juxtaposition of the rural and industrial encapsulates the divergent life of the valley.

A simple pictorial structure, flat to the picture plane, is also evident in the painting 'St Mary's Church, Treherbert' (circa 1950) With an element of boldness the view downhill places all the significant content in the upper half of the painting. Again the colour palette and tones are limited. The terraced houses only take form from a distance; close to they are impressionistic irregular blocks of colour. Life, other than the individual running down the footpath, is omitted.

The painting 'Ton Pentre' (circa 1956) with its brighter colours and movement captures something of the ambivalence of mood in the decade after the 2nd. World War. There was optimism following nationalisation of the coal industry, but also an underlying recognition of economic fragility - the Maindy colliery had closed in 1948. The pictorial structure of scissor-like terraces leading towards the closed colliery are supported by the depiction of elements of social cohesion - the chapels, school, institutes etc. It is a scene he returned to on several occasions but with a more muted and sombre palette.



Whilst not the painting exhibited, the view of 'Blaencwm' (circa 2006) at the end of a tributary valley to the Rhondda valley was essentially the same. It was composed of strong horizontal and vertical elements dominated by the hill. There is a sense of enclosure, almost other- worldliness in the starkness portrayed. He returned to the village on many occasions painting many street scenes and also the same scene under different conditions. In the latter case viewpoints were adjusted and elements were introduced to provide compositional balance. Indeed he frequently over-painted previous work to achieve the composition and desired vision. The exhibition painting was one such; it was less defined in detail in the foreground but included several figures and reflections on the wet road.



In my opinion the painting 'Ty Draw & the Hook and Eye' (circa 2008) was the most interesting and engaging. It depicts the Blaencwm valley near Treherbert. It is painted in grey and white with highlights in tonal brownish yellow and green. It is a painting based on memories which are evoked without the precise depiction of the industrial landscape. Little is distinct or detailed yet everything is clear and obvious; the terraced and semi-detached houses, the railway and road snaking up the valley, the collieries and spoil heaps. As such it is a powerful yet un sentimental evocation of a community and way of life that had disappeared. The Rhondda Fawr valley has changed dramatically since he left - *"It doesn't belong to me anymore, it's so strange, it has almost left me"*

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**FIND THESE GALLERIES AND MUSEUMS, HORIZONTALLY AND VERTICALLY IN THE GRID**

- NATIONAL GALLERY
- THE LOWRY
- ASHMOLEAN
- FITZWILLIAM
- ALBANY
- RUSSELL COATES
- TULLIE HOUSE
- COMPTON VERNEY
- THE LIGHTBOX
- TATE ST IVES
- COURTHAULD
- TATE MODERN
- TRUES YARD
- THE TETLEY
- TOWNER
- FUSE
- SAATCHI
- BERWICK
- HAYWARD

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The new website includes news of events and meetings, there is a gallery where you can display or sell your work, all copies of this newsletter are available and you can join or renew as a member.