

FOR GALLERIES MAY ISSUE

Cardiff regained

by Caroline Juler

A pall has been hovering over the visual arts in Cardiff. Disappointingly, after all the hype and bitterness, (it was going to revolutionise the public's viewing experience, cost a fortune and destroyed a beloved older art space in the process, see below), the Centre for Visual Arts has closed months after it opened. Now, despite, and in some cases, because of brutal restructuring, Wales's capital is shaking off its disappointments and fighting back.

Cardiff has put in a bid to become European City of Culture in 2008, and in two years time it celebrates 100 years as a capital. Great hopes have been pinned on three main enterprises: the transformation of the old tram depot in Penderys Street as a venue for changing exhibitions, the extension of the **National Museum and Gallery of Wales** as a permanent showcase for its collection of Welsh art and the opening of Margam Park as a national photography centre. With or without these yet-to-be-realised cultural filips, the town on the Taff is burgeoning with enterprises that steady the reeling brain. Out on Albany Road, the **Albany Gallery** does a brisk trade in paintings and crafts that oscillate between the adventurous and the comfortable. Founded forty years ago, it is proud of its role as Kyffin Williams's sole agent in Wales. **Martin Tinney's** new gallery in St. Andrew's Place is more sophisticated; 'clean', interconnecting spaces allow pictures and carvings to speak, and there is an interesting smattering of new talent among rock-solid masters such as David Jones and Ceri Richards. A skip across Park Place brings you to a superb triumvirate of Neo-Classical buildings in Cathays Park; the right hand one is the National Museum where Swansea-based Tim Davies found inspiration for his recent, controversial video piece, Drum, in the Victorian statue of a drummer boy by Goscombe John.

Once you have learnt to dodge the motorways, Cardiff's centre has the advantage of being small enough to walk around: within a ten minutes' saunter from Cathays Park is **St. David's Hall**, a large, modern theatre and concert hall with two generous foyers that display a continuous programme of changing exhibitions. From here it is easy to

find g39, on the corner of Mill Lane and The Hayes. Recent graduates Chris Jones and Anthony Shapland established the gallery in 1998 specifically to support young artists in Wales and they are now key players in planning the city's future art projects. Both stayed here to avoid London's commercialism. Close by, in a cul de sac off Newport Road, is Howard Gardens Gallery, a modest, ground-floor space in the art college dedicated to 'cutting edge' contemporary work. A stone's throw from here at 26 Moira Place is the self-effacing front door of Andre Stitt's 'installaction' gallery, Trace, which he opened three years ago. Trace is going strong: international performance artists are queuing up for a chance to come here. Everyone who performs in Stitt's house has to leave a 'trace' of their work, usually an installation that stays up for a few weeks after they leave. Stitt told me 'young artists are realising how great Cardiff is; they aren't moving away like they used to. This city has a tradition of time-based art dating back to the '60s.' Trace is open at weekends by appointment. Sharing this punchy attitude is Capsule, a short stroll back towards the centre at 39 Charles Street. Occupying three rooms of an elegant Georgian terrace house, the gallery shows established and emerging artists. The owners, who are still in their twenties, started Capsule off the back of a successful music and fashion business. Refreshingly, they talk about New York as though it were closer than London.

To make way for the (short-lived) Centre for Visual Arts, a group of artists had to move out of the Old Library. They have reformed as a cooperative in Canton. Their gallery, Oriel Canfas, is a bright spot in a rundown terrace at 44a Glamorgan Street. Shows alternate between in-house work and exhibitions by others; in May there is a selection from the art college's degree show. Behind Canfas is the impressive market building that houses Chapter Arts Centre. There now is Hidden, a show of highly individual photographs from the 2002 Aghanistan war by Paul Seawright; concurrently ffotogallery is exhibiting his early photos at Turner House in Penarth. ffotogallery has started a two-year residency at Turner House, a few minutes' walk from two other initiatives in contemporary art, **Oriel Washington** and the Adam Gallery.

The lower end of Bute Street is just about all that is left of legendary Butetown. Behind forbidding double doors at 54b is a group of 16 artists studios where Eisteddfod-winning painter Phil Nicol plans to turn a large, ground floor area into Bay

Art, opening in October this year. Changes to Cardiff Bay have been drastic, but I was happy to rest my feet in the wedge-shaped glass-house that is Craft in the Bay. I watched a token tug bouncing self-importantly across the water, and reflected on the unpredictable relationship between dispossession and regeneration. For once, the sky was clear of shadows.