

Malcolm Hughes and John Meirion Morris 'Treweryn – Under the Lake'

MoMA, Machynlleth, 1 August – 30 Sept 2005

A few years ago I met one of the engineers who flooded the Treweryn Valley to provide extra water for the City of Liverpool. He dismissed protests against the destruction of the north Wales beautyspot, and more particularly the village of Capel Celyn and its outlying farms, as irrelevant 'fuss'. Forty years on the drowning of Capel Celyn remains a sensitive issue, in the minds of some people at least, because they claim that the city's authorities wanted to sell the water for profit. Malcolm Hughes, an artist of such modesty that he doesn't even keep lists of his own exhibitions, is one of them. This show contains 15 charcoal sketches of abandoned houses, the homeless villagers and of a demonstration that they mounted in Liverpool. They are stark and powerful images. The charcoal lines, with their strong downward strokes interspersed with touches of other colours, emphasise the desolation of the abandoned, handsome buildings, some of which dated from the 16th century, of the half-demolished chapel and the loneliness of the people who were forced to leave them, possibly for no good reason. Exaggeratedly grief-stricken faces loom out of the pictures, delivering a raw emotional punch that is not angry so much as desperately bewildered. These drawings are beautiful in their own right and would work without a political peg to hang them on. Many of the men who lost their homes worked on the reservoir

project which doesn't prove that they were in favour of it, but shows that the issue, like the pictures, are not absolutely black and white.

Malcolm Hughes studied art at Denbighshire Technical College. He learnt most from the painter Wynne Lewis, who was a protégé of William Coldstream a rising star of the Euston Road School and now virtually unknown. It seems typical of this artist's selflessness that he is keener to promote his tutor than himself.

John Meirion Morris has designed a monument to Capel Celyn in the form of a bronze swan which is seen lifting itself into the air. The figure's outline imitates the shape of the aircraft Concord. On the inside of its wings, the rows of feathers look like figures in a ghostly chorus, their mouths opened in a unanimous shout. One of the maquettes for this piece is on show at the UN headquarters in Washington, DC. No-one knows if funding for the full-sized statue, which should stand at the reservoir's edge, will materialise.

PLUS

Geoff Yeomans at Ceri Richards Gallery, Swansea

Geoff Yeomans's show at the Ceri Richards Gallery, Swansea University (22 July-27 August) is also about abandonment but this time, it is connected with the things that get left behind on seashores. His oil paintings imbue rusting metal and plastic rubbish with symbolic meanings far from their original

utilitarian purpose and integrate these sad objects into vibrant, almost abstract seascapes, across whose skies vapour trails shoot like meteorites' tails.