

Pwyllgor Diwylliant, y Gymraeg a Chyfathrebu
Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee
CWLC(5)-08-16 P15

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Bethan Jenkins AM
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
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27 October 2016

Dear Bethan James,

I am writing to you in your capacity as Chair of the Culture Committee to express my personal concern that the 'Historic Wales' proposals may have a detrimental impact on the reputation and visibility of the Welsh national art collection. Wales, unlike England, Scotland and Ireland, has no national gallery, and its artists and cultural patrons have not been as well-known in Wales or further afield as they merit.

Much has been done in recent years, within Amgueddfa Cymru, as well as by other scholars, to explore and present the visual culture of Wales from the Middle Ages to the present. As Keeper of Art at Amgueddfa Cymru between 1998 and 2015, I sought to tell that the story of artists and their supporters in Wales, and to explore their interaction with the wider world. This was the purpose of the recent (2007-11) expansion and representation of the Museum's art galleries. I am concerned that the visual arts will not sit comfortably within a broader body concerned with the heritage of Wales.

In the fine and applied arts Amgueddfa Cymru is not simply concerned with the past, as much of its current focus is on recent and contemporary art. One third of its collection galleries, and much of its temporary exhibition programme, are devoted to art after 1970. We also have a vital role in supporting the work of other visual arts providers in Wales, through 'Sharing Treasures' and through loans and advice.

Of particular concern to me is the future of the Museum's international programmes in the visual arts, which include the critically acclaimed *Artes Mundi* contemporary biennale, and partnerships with a number of European and US museums, universities and exhibition organisers. Because the latter generate income (but are

not undertaken primarily for that purpose) a merging of Amgueddfa Cymru's commercial operations with those of other heritage bodies may threaten their future in their present form, in which the needs of the home audience and the well-being of the collections are paramount. At a time when Brexit may also impact on the Museum's ability to sustain this work, any further uncertainty is regrettable.

As a national museum, Amgueddfa Cymru works with many partners to unlock the knowledge and potential encapsulated in its collections for the benefit of all. The loss of its independence to do this in accordance with the goals expressed in its charter would impoverish Welsh public life.

Yours sincerely

Oliver Fairclough MA FSA

Trustee, Arts Alive Wales, and Monnow Valley Arts