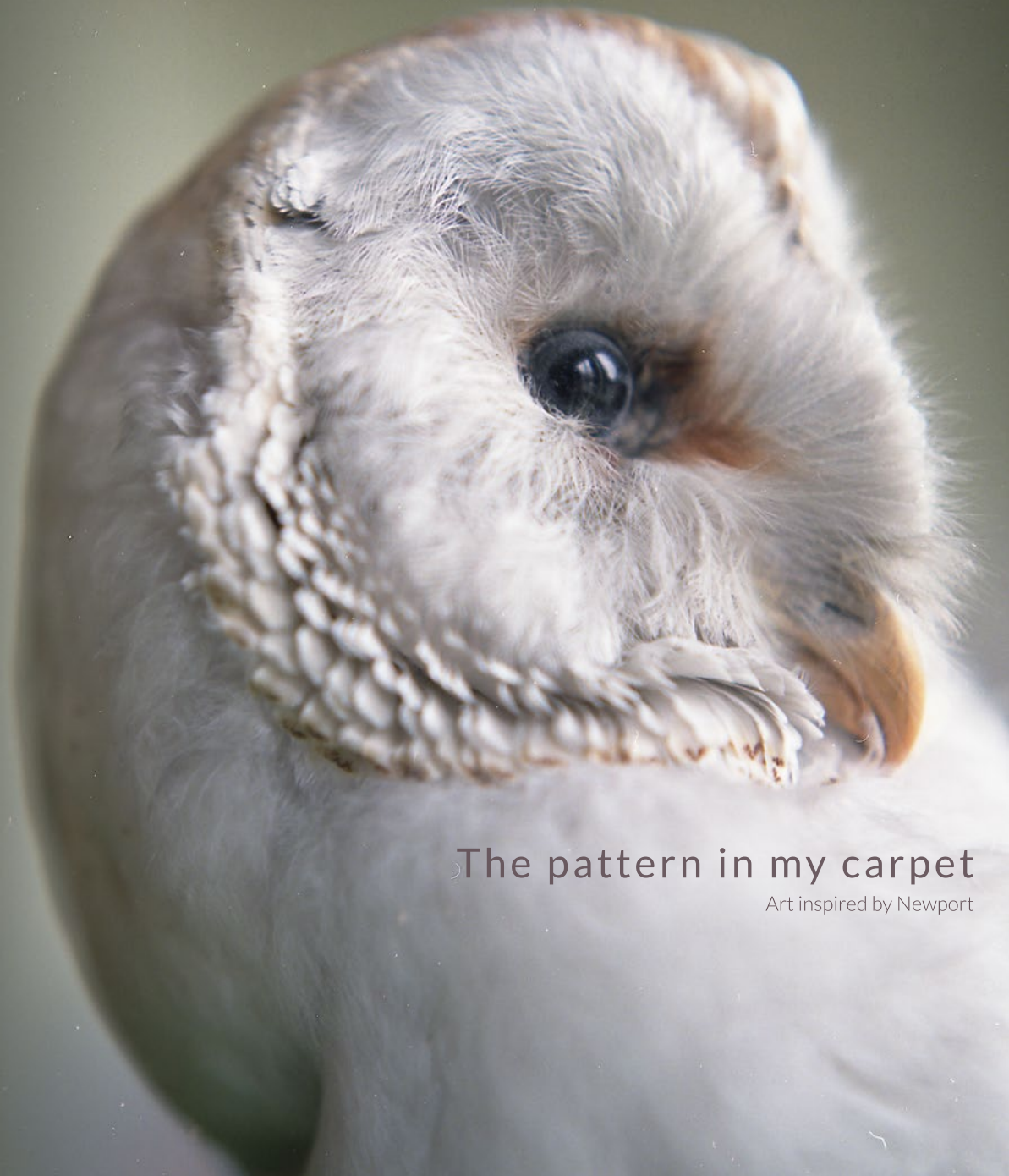




The pattern in my carpet

Art inspired by Newport

This publication was produced to accompany the exhibition *The pattern in my carpet* situated in various locations within Newport town centre.

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The old and the new clash

In 1801 a sumptuous volume by William Coxe entitled *An Historical Tour Through Monmouthshire* was first published. This book importantly included a map of the Borough of Newport. Coxe described the town thus: ‘Notwithstanding its trade and situation, the population is very inconsiderable, it contains 221 houses and tenements and 1087 souls.’ Coxe’s map shows the early 19th century Borough, but what isn’t made clear is that this boundary line is already at least 500 years old. The town was first granted an official Charter in 1324 though the document was lost, however the later 1427 Charter survived. It reaffirmed the original in setting out privileges for the inhabitants, and demarcating the town boundary. This remained unchanged until just before the Chartists came marching down Stow Hill in 1839.

It’s possible to walk this mediaeval boundary today, and by a happy coincidence it’s also possible to take in some of the history of the City of Newport along the way. An appropriate starting point is St Woolos Cathedral. Gwynllyw, a 5th century warlord was told in a dream that he would find a white ox with a black spot on its forehead, and that on the site of this discovery he should establish a church. He did, and with his warring days ceased, he was later canonised and over time the church’s name transmuted to St Woolos. Sebastien Boyesen was appointed Town Sculptor in 1992: his first bronze was entitled *This Little Piggy* and sits outside Newport Market, and he went on to create a massive bronze ox commemorating the story of the cathedral in *The Vision of St Gwynllyw*. Ironically Sebastien had wanted to study sculpture in Newport, but on the day of his interview became strangely nervous, took a drink too many, and was rejected.

The boundary line sets off in a north easterly direction and passes through a small children’s park, but in 1842 it had just become a private cemetery, and a number of the grave stones can still be seen. Emerging through a small gate at the far end, the traveller comes upon a very ancient alleyway. This narrow

passage probably marks the rear lane of the medieval houses that fronted onto Stow Hill. Half way down is the back end of what was, during the 1970s, the Students’ Union and it was here that John Mellor, later known as Joe Strummer of The Clash, played his first gig with the art college band, The Vultures.

Just beyond the end of the alley and heading off to the right in the direction of Stow Hill lies another short passage, and just in front of this in 1871 sat a small terrace of houses known as Waters Row. One of its inhabitants, prisoner 111, was spending a short spell in Usk Prison on the treadmill. He’d stolen a shovel from his place of work in the Dos Iron Foundry. He was Charles Ball, who had lived with his parents and his seven siblings in the upstairs of one of the tiny hovels. Charles was among a distinguished group of Newportonians as he was one of the first prisoners to be individually photographed aged only 16.



“Charles Ball” courtesy of Gwent Archives

The boundary made its way across Jones Street emerging into St Mary’s Street, where in 1972 photography student Linda Keith lived. Linda had been a model in the “Swinging Sixties” and hung around with the likes of Jean Shrimpton and David Bailey. In 1966 Linda joined her new boyfriend, Keith Richards, on a Rolling Stones tour of America.

It was whilst in a night club in New York that she spotted Jimi Hendrix and recognising his great talent introduced him to Chas Chandler who became his manger: the rest is history. Linda is credited with having had two songs written about her; “Ruby Tuesday” and “Sending my love to Linda”. She had come to Newport to study Documentary Photography at Newport Art College under the tutelage of friend and Magnum photographer David Hurn.



“Linda, Kieth & Richard” courtesy of Richard Frame

The boundary continues in a north easterly direction crossing Bridge Street. It makes its way through the railway station and across the tracks, finally arriving at Gold Tops. It was here in 1839 that huge crowds gathered to listen to the charismatic Chartist orator Henry Vincent. The boundary now makes its way to Malpas Brook at Malpas Road and follows it until it runs into the River Usk. From there it runs south along the centre of the river passing the ancient castle, built to protect the river crossing during the Middle Ages. Passing through the subway and emerging into “The Old Green Crossing”, we find the wonderful mosaic created by Kenneth Budd that celebrates the arrival of the canal in 1800. One hundred metres south is Peter Fink’s Steel Wave constructed in 1990 to celebrate Newport’s own history as a modern steel-making town. Beyond the wave rises the Riverfront Theatre built in 2006, where the remains of a medieval ship were found. Downriver the boundary comes

ashore, emerging in the middle of the fantastic new building that is the City Centre campus of the University of South Wales. From here the boundary travels east, making its way under the Kingsway Shopping Centre, twisting down past the Police Station on Cardiff Road and up Clytha Square and Vicarage Lane, back to where it started at St Woolos Cathedral.

Coxe wouldn’t recognise Newport. That new fangled canal that had just arrived in the town in 1800 was to transform the village by leaps and bounds into the city of the 21st century. Newport has experienced difficult times, but it has always punched above its weight. Its history includes the preserved footprints of hunter-gatherers, the medieval ship and the Chartists. Sport has been equally important and has seen champion boxers and even an All Black-crushing rugby team. Music has played its part, and it’s thanks to the late Johnny Sicolo and T.J.’s nightclub for putting Newport on the world map that there’s always been an impressive number of art students that have gone on to achieve great things.

So for the modern day traveller around the city, it may be useful to heed the words of local writer Arthur Machen, when he wrote ‘Here then, is the pattern in my carpet, the eternal beauty hidden beneath the crust of common and commonplace things, if you care to look with purged eyes it’s easier to discern the secret beauty and wonder in humble and common things.’ So step out, take to the streets, look beyond the ordinary, embrace the past, its stories and its people, but remember just like the ancient boundary the city is on the move again, embrace it, go with it, help it and most importantly enjoy it.

Richard Frame



The reign of the Holly King was inspired by the story of Culhwch ac Olwen. Culhwch, seeking to marry Olwen, must complete forty tasks set by her father in exchange for his blessing. One of these tasks is the rescue of Mabon, the son of Modron the Mother Goddess who has been imprisoned. To complete his task, Culhwch employs the help of the forest's wisest animals whereupon the salmon agrees to take Culhwch to Mabon's prison in Gloucester to free him.

Newport is now renowned for its industrial heritage and appears to have lost its connections to its Celtic

heritage; becoming an outpost of England despite its proximity to Caerleon, the site of the mythical court of Camelot. As such, this project presents an exploration into a culture prior to mechanization. Following the closure of Newport's industry the town has witnessed an economic decline which may be likened to the withdrawal of life during winter as embodied by myths of the Holly King and the battle between seasons. This withdrawal draws parallels to Mabon's imprisonment; a dark time of rest removed from the exterior world.



'But the stones had told him that the old man was still with him, and that made him feel more confident. He looked around at the empty plaza again, feeling less desperate than before. This wasn't a strange place; it was a new one.' - *The alchemist*, Paulo Coelho.

Originating from Belgium, Diego Slosse began his exploration of Newport as a stranger to its many contrasts and diverse

inhabitants. *Down by the river* sees Slosse focus his enquiry on the Pillgwenlly district commonly known as "Pill" from an outsider's perspective. Slosse's images seek to highlight Pill as a hive of activity and diversity, held together by a steadfast community spirit. Subsequently, *Down by the River* is dedicated to the individuals Slosse met and photographed, and to the Pill community as a whole.





The term “Mudcrawlers” appeared during the industrial revolution when Irish citizens suffering from the potato famine and resultant poverty immigrated to areas of Britain including Newport, South Wales. Herded aboard boats like cattle, they were ruthlessly dumped overboard at the town’s coastal regions including the mouth and banks of the River Usk. Fighting to crawl over the treacherous mudflats, the Irish struggled to reach the town to find work and make a living.

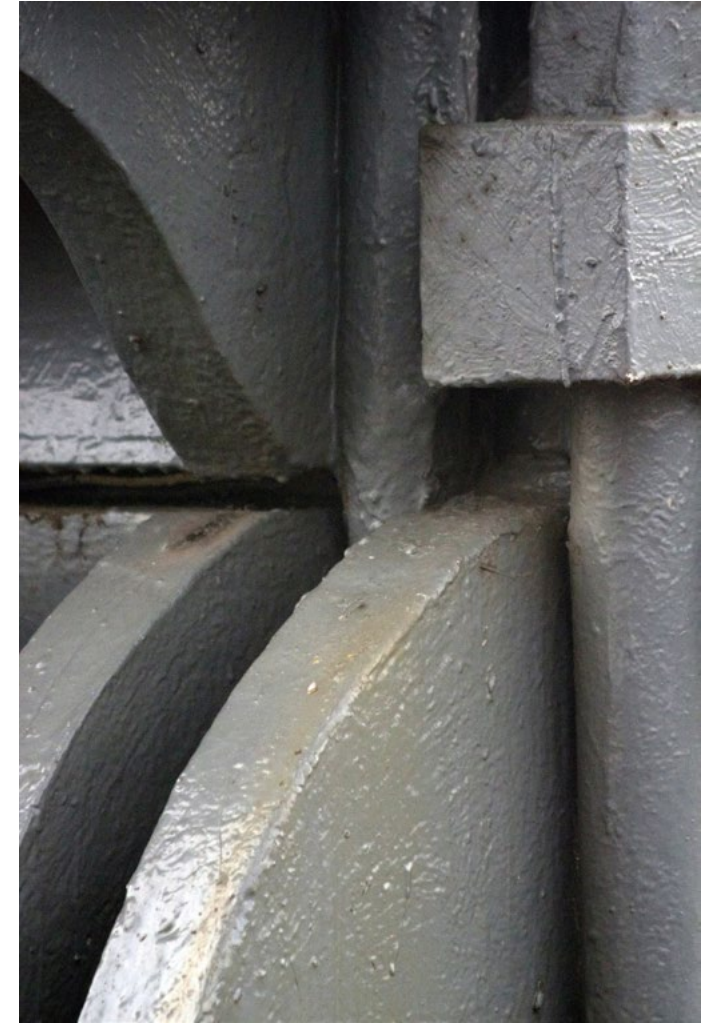
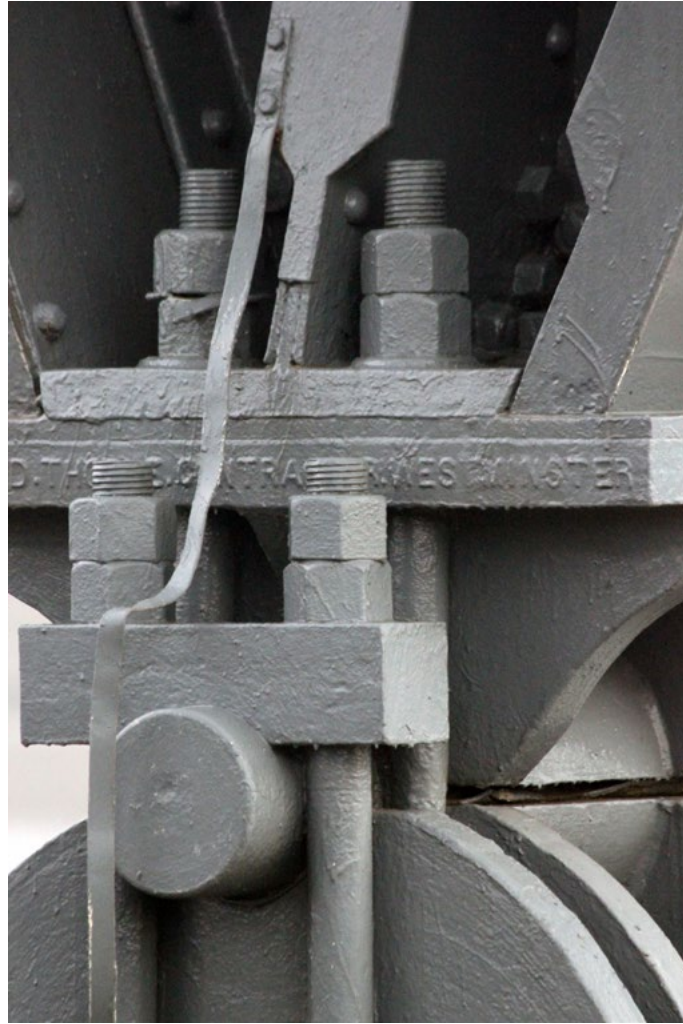
Through re-enactment, Taylor has attempted to portray the struggle of the Mudcrawlers. Subsequently, the work intends to bring to light a forgotten period in Newport’s history as well as the status and trials of the refugee.



Travelling by bus we immerse ourselves within the city. On public transport and in public space, we surrender control of our journey and are shielded from the outside environment. Passengers sit separately, perhaps reading or blocking out the world with headphones; we all share the same physical space, yet we might say that we do not inhabit the same place.

Newport is Williams' hometown, and View from the Inside depicts a private reflection and passage through the city as experienced by the photographer. The bus window both frames and restricts our line of vision, making evident this barrier between public and private by way of reflections and marks on the glass surface. Sometimes the city passes in a blur, punctured only with the occasional bus stop to disrupt the flow.





Concerned with notions of everyday passage in life, Upham adopts the Newport Transporter Bridge as a metaphor, subverting the clichéd images of this historic landmark. Foregoing these archetypal visual tropes, Upham instead focuses on the intricate structure and form of the bridge's base. Through shifting our attention to the crucial foundations, Upham demands

the viewer to experience this famous symbol from a new perspective; uprooted from its well-known past, and considered as pure form. Consequently, through highlighting the bridge's cutting edge design, we are invited to consider a new way of seeing Newport's most recognisable landmark.

Urban: meaning city or large town.

Newport, once a busy town for the transportation of industrial resources, supplied work to thousands of people until the abrupt end of the coal industry. In 2002 Newport was granted city status by the British Monarch, bringing with it plans of rejuvenation to revive its image.

Newman's work concerns those features of Newport which are often overlooked by passers-by for their seemingly unaesthetic qualities. While they do not conform to traditional conceptions of the beautiful, Newman considers these details as constitutive of Newport's own urban beauty; from the strong beams of a flyover to underground tunnels and symmetrical architecture.

Urban beauty calls into question the life of these structures in light of further demolition and renovation, exploring temporality and the inevitability of change; as Blake Stimson has said, 'as in Nature where the older is devoured by the newer.' Newman's images therefore entreat the spectator to consider Newport in a new light, endeavouring to restore Newport's image in the present, before the onset of change.



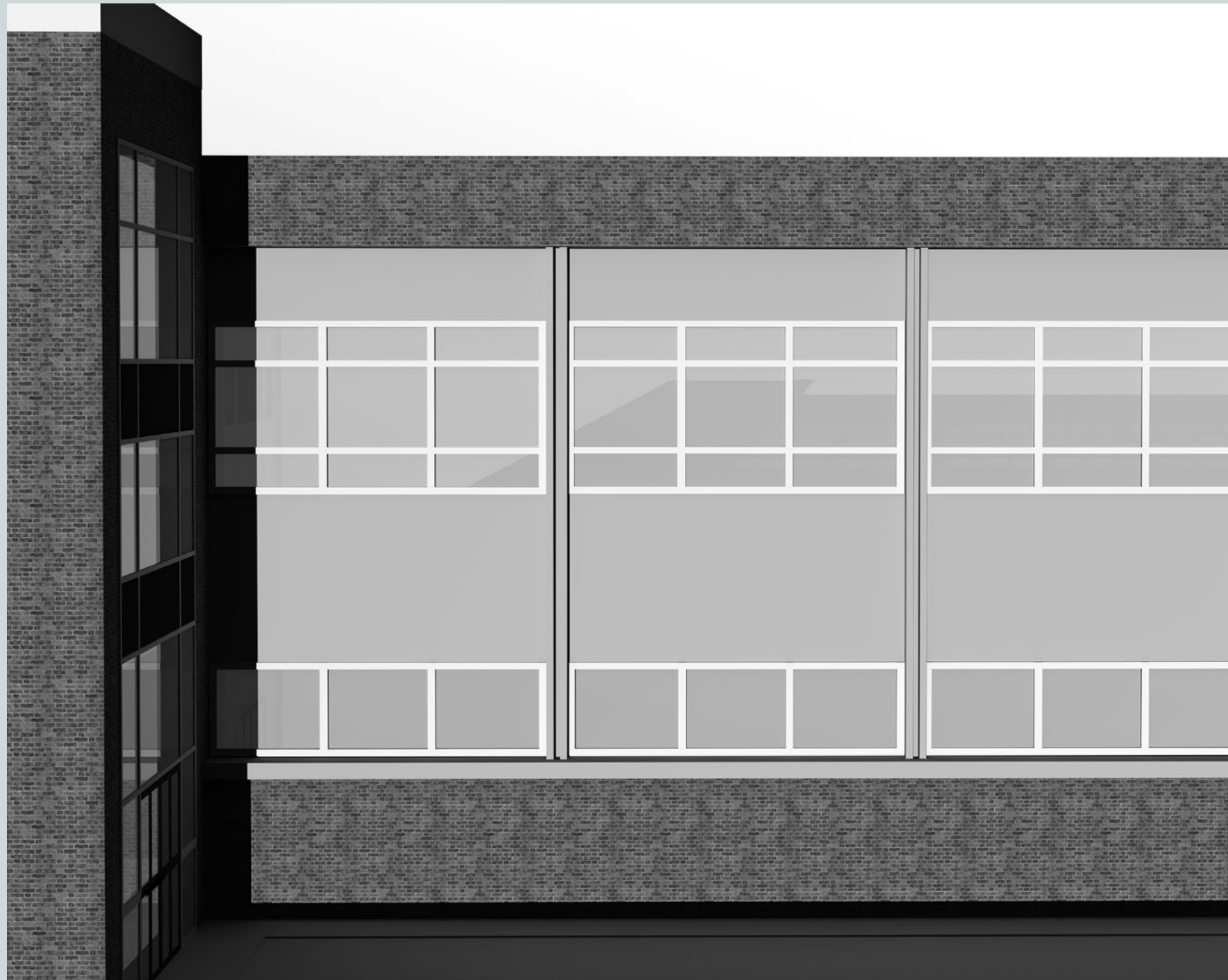


“You can decorate absence however you want- but you’re still gonna feel what’s missing.” - Siobhan Vivian

At first glance, Newport appears to be a place of contradictions, full of nothing yet everything simultaneously. Derelict buildings and empty shops indicate a desire to leave the city, and this sense of abandonment can dominate our perception. It is these assumptions however, that Oleksik wishes to challenge, arguing instead that these dilapidated areas

are in fact full of substance.

Absence focuses on the traces left behind from human inhabitancy, highlighting the transience of the city’s population against its architectural backdrop. *Absence* does not offer a promise of return. While plans for Newport’s regeneration are underway, Oleksik presents these once occupied yet forgotten areas of the city as permanent features in its landscape.

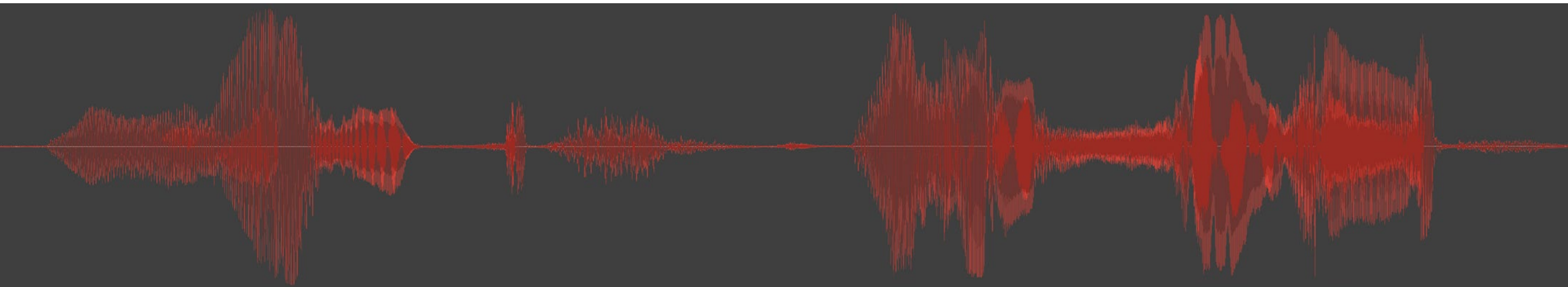


Throughout the 1970s Birmingham was Britain's most prosperous city with family incomes exceeding even those in London. To combat this, central government restricted the cities growth, and aiming to disperse industry in the area, proposed to move part of Ford production to Newport, South Wales.

One click away presents a crop from a three dimensional digital model of Ford's Newport Office, created from the preliminary 1970s plans to construct the production factory in Albany Street behind the former Gas Works. The model has been intentionally cropped; this subversion placing the image within the discourse of contemporary imaging technologies and photographic practice. In contrast, the black and white image makes a clear reference to the history of photography and the image's authority as historic document, thus allowing Weekes to furnish a possible past with the weight of historical evidence.



Relocating from the historical city of Prague, famed for its vibrant art and culture, to the quiet Welsh city of Newport, struggling to keep afloat amidst economic recession, initially cast doubts on Tomkova's decision to study in the city. Through black and white imagery, Tomkova attempts to communicate the emptiness she perceived while exploring Newport's streets, noticing only vacant houses and shop windows. As her relationship towards Newport developed however, she made a natural transition to colour, discovering the true essence of Newport and acknowledging its underlying beauty. In so doing, Newport: 2013 presents the unique colour of Newport as experienced by Tomkova, proposing a latent perception of the city which belies its initial appearances.

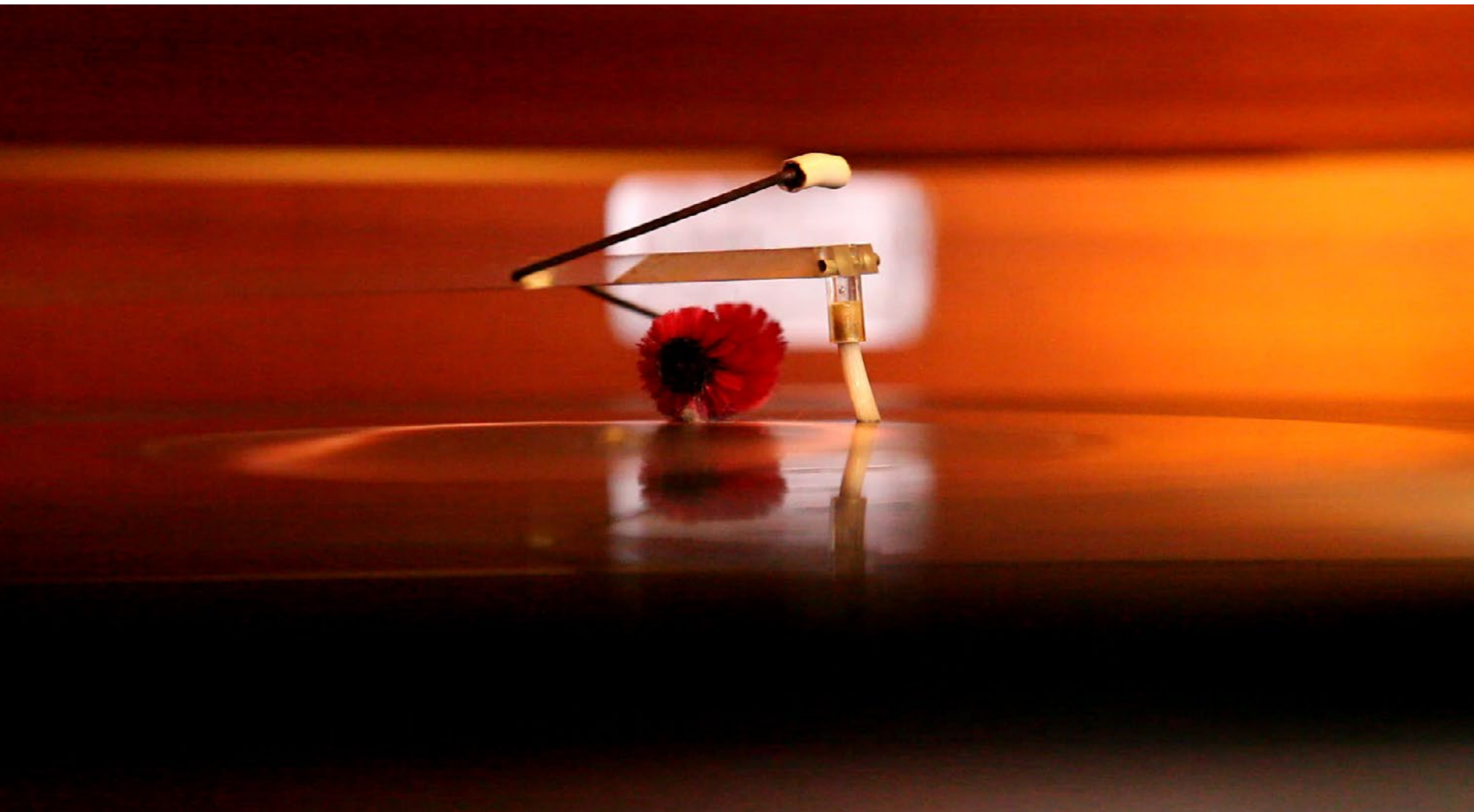


St Woolos Cathedral began as a vision. Seen in the dream of prince Gwynllyw as a white ox with a black dot upon its forehead, the land on which he found this animal is where the cathedral sits today. Located on the top of Stow Hill overlooking Newport, the cathedral is considered to be a building of great antiquity, having been a sight of worship since the early 6th century. Within its walls can be witnessed a history of marks; traces of adaption and reconstruction dating back to the Norman period.

We might say that the first of these marks manifested itself in the original vision; the forehead of the ox,

which as part of the building's make up, leaves behind its ghostly trace. This trace becomes one among many, such as those left behind by the cathedral's decreasing religious community in recent years.

Using audio Foster recaptures the vision of the ox, evoking a sense of absence yet remembrance that lies within the Cathedral's history. Abrupt sounds pierce in an attempt to awaken Newport's misplaced past; gesturing towards the sonic landscape that surrounded the cathedral years ago.



A broken record is a term commonly employed to describe someone or something that repeats itself. Incorporating footage of a skipping record, Fraser utilizes a visual metaphor to signify the recurring stories surrounding Newport's infamous music scene. Through appropriating found footage from documentaries, interviews and music videos combined with specially filmed sequences, Fraser plays with the illusory nature of nostalgia which keeps the memory of Newport's music scene alive; holding onto its past glory.

These multiple voices overlap, resulting in a cacophony of testimonies rendering each other indecipherable. As such, *Broken record* highlights the repetitive nature of these narratives and their ultimate failure to address or acknowledge the lack of community in the present.



More frequently now than ever, our experience of events is manifold, split between tangible acts in the 'real world', and the realm of representation. This desire for our representations to provide us with information presents us with a new field of enquiry raising new questions to be addressed. When an act of violence has been committed, what information can be gleaned from printed representation, and indeed can any be communicated through the mechanism of mechanical reproduction? *After* questions the truth value of the visible and the readable, we must ask ourselves who holds the power to re-present an event, and interrogate the aims and objectives in the processes of news reportage.



Wakefield employs archival imagery from early 20th century Newport to explore the disjuncture between photographic representation and reality. Whilst earlier images of Newport might conjure up feelings of nostalgia, depicting a busy and vibrant city, today's representations exude the very

opposite. Asking locals to sum up their experience of Newport in a single word, Wakefield uses language to question the efficacy of the photograph in representing reality whilst simultaneously underscoring the extent to which the council adopts these subjectivities for its own gain.



Converting analogue archival images into modern-day digital copies, Watling transports the past vibrancy and prosperity of Newport's high street into the present. Constructing alternative narratives through the photographic medium, fashion and the archive, Newport is subsequently remapped. Past landscapes and crowds are juxtaposed against a contemporary backdrop of shop manikins; ubiquitous in today's retail environments.

Watling implements the shop window as a space of coalescence; while the reflections of the current high street situate the viewer firmly in the present, we are equally confronted by an aesthetic of the past, urging us to reflect upon the disparity between the ideals of the old and the potential of the new.



Using taxidermy as a protagonist, Everett draws comparisons between this practice and the City of Newport, interrogating notions of temporality, history, metaphor and desire. Taxidermy reached the height of its popularity in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, coinciding with the prosperity of Newport, once a bustling, wealthy city. That time has now passed however, and like the stretched hides, beginning to crack and break, the memory of Newport's opulence appears precarious, its unattainable glory staring out at us from behind blank glass eyes.

The texture of memory also mines the complex relationship between humans and taxidermy. Being both a part of nature yet perpetually distancing ourselves from it establishes a tension only witnessed within the human condition. Perhaps then, these animal-objects are less centred on a desire toward the animal form and more towards a platform for defining ourselves as human animal subjects.



Obtaining access to Newport's infamous subterranean passage, Julian constructs a visual document of the space as a lived environment. Focussing on the communities and individuals that inhabited it, the site becomes imbued with notions of belonging, home and communal space. Focussing on discarded belongings and remains, evidence of substance abuse is uncovered alongside more familiar scenes of domesticity such as organised sleeping arrangements. As a location

which has witnessed the loss of several lives, from drug related deaths to murder, *Underground* depicts a space entangled with the concept of human mortality, the traces of which visually attest to its past.

In documenting and making visible this once turbulent site, Julian underlines pertinent questions concerning humanity and ethics in the rehabilitation of those suffering from extreme addiction.



“The Positive Gateway” was launched in the middle of 2011 and will run for four years as part of the Pillgwenlly regeneration programme. Concerning the restoration of Commercial Road and the junction connecting it to Commercial Street, the scheme aims to introduce improved links between Pillgwenlly and the city centre. The framework for the programme acknowledges that the compliance and responsiveness of the community will be highly influential in the success of the project.

Lorne’s images explore human relationships to the environment, concentrating on specific areas of the junction and Commercial Road. Focussing on unfinished construction projects, abandoned furniture and littered pavements, *The positive gateway* forces us to question how the community arrived at this point. Through this undertaking, Lorne hopes to highlight the apparent indifference and lack of care towards the area, providing a platform from which the cause of these issues may be addressed by the public.



"brutal, violent attack"

"kicked, punched a



On the night of Saturday 20th August 2011, Jerzy Dubiniec finished the night shift at the bakery. He was walking home when Gavin Mills attacked him on Broad Street. Mr. Dubiniec was 'repeatedly kicked, butted and punched' to his death.

The process of bread making is integral to Kubicki's work. The tactile act can be interpreted as an embodiment of murder victim Jerzy Dubiniec and his profession as a baker, an occupation that has long been a cornerstone for nearly all communities. In *Bread-man* however, this innocent act is rendered as a manifestation of the physical violence inflicted upon Dubiniec. The physical exertion involved thus takes on a more sinister quality once the viewer develops an awareness of the work's context.

Appropriating text from the news accounts which circulated at the time, the work adopts the cold factual language typical of journalistic objectivity; rejecting the humanity of its subject. Kubicki thus provides the audience with both visual and contextual information from which they might begin to piece together the event itself, reconstructing the narrative of this violent act.

Change the world

In the 19th century the French novelist Gustave Flaubert wrote: ‘Life is so horrible, that one can only bear it by avoiding it. And that can be done by living in the world of art.’ Flaubert turned away from the ‘world’ and toward perfect form; his disillusionment was foundational in the development of Modernism, which exalted in the complete autonomy of the work of art. These budding forms would occupy the white cube of the gallery, would be commodified in the markets, and would be collected as investments or in the archives of Museums. These artworks seemed to communicate meaning only in relation to each other, often in a language considered obscure by many, and at times through a confrontational aesthetic. The value and purpose of exclusively Modernist art began to be interrogated toward the last third of the 20th century – as Postmodernist practice recognised a need for new forms that emphasized the relations between personal creativity and social responsibility, rather than modernist patterns of alienation and confrontation.

There began to develop from the early 1990s a reframing of worldviews from every sector – including the art world. A more

participatory, socially interactive framework emerged for the making of art, a framework that encouraged a dialogue outside of its own sphere of the art world (and the art school). This new perspective didn’t replace aesthetics but asked for a deeper account of what art was doing, reformulating its meanings and purposes toward context or social responsibility in order to meet the challenges of increasingly global economies and cultures.

Photographic art has had a distinct historical trajectory in this movement from ‘art for art’s sake’ to more considered contexts and audience inclusivity because of everything it shares with the Photograph and the myriad uses to which it is put – it’s reportage, it’s advertising, it’s vernacular, and it’s everywhere. Significantly, the history of the Photograph is that of looking out at the world with a degree of inherent authority and authenticity.

Contemporary practitioners have applied themselves to deconstructing the ideologies behind these assumptions in their efforts to transform the singular perspective of the lens to a more collaborative vision.

Thus the art school experience of the ‘live project’ is particularly important – and Newport has long been accustomed to art and photography students arriving each year for their education here. Those hundred years or so have seen a lot of changes but the presence of students has always been evident. In just the time that I’ve been in Newport I’ve seen Fine Art students’ site specific works in a range of places from transforming the orangery at Tredegar House to symbolic arrows floating down the river Usk toward the ruins of the castle near the town centre. I’ve seen wave after wave of Documentary Photography students photographing the people of Newport and then seen the photographs published in the work section of The Guardian, associating nationally the name of the city with the pictures of people at work displayed on the page.

This year, second year students from the Photographic Art course at the newly constituted University of South Wales have spent the last few months working in and around Newport to create works aimed at engaging the community and its history. That work, published here, is exhibited at the Museum and at one of the empty shops on the high street. It’s given them the experience of considering site or place (Newport) in making work, it’s required of them a consideration of the community and larger political and economic conditions, and it’s asked them to question the purpose of art in relation to particular audiences. It’s been an invitation to collaboration that will comprise an important part of their professional futures.

It has been another chapter in the vitalizing history of the ‘art school’ and the city.

Eileen Little



A digital version of this publication can be found at: uswphotoart.co.uk/publications

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