

Response following a visit to *Geoffrey Olsen 'Before the Window'*
Cyfarthfa Castle Museum & Art Gallery, Merthyr Tydfil, April 2012

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All of the works in Geoffrey Olsen's Merthyr show have a cohesive affinity with the geographic, geologic and human-industrial area. They are succinct in their constructional, drawn gravitas and sombre constitutions partly endorsed by their use of limited palettes.

The strength in the Merthyr show is emphatically in the four smaller connected artefacts in acrylic, papers and mixed media. This is because of the intrinsic solutions within each painting combined with the extrinsic connections, both between the designs in each painting and the subjects. That is visually in their constructional recurrences and the affinities of media between each painting; and, just as stridently, in the subjects of landscapes in the Merthyr area and the painter's memory and perceptions as they changed. The physicality of experience demonstrated proprioceptively in front of the landscapes, as the landscapes themselves changed in different weathers and extended industrial workings, realised again after the initial complexity through the developed experiences of looking, held then remembered and seen again. The meditative dark and matt flatness emphasised by the variety of blacks and greys against the deliberately limited use of shocks from greens and whites and reds, which add shifting contemplations of perspective. The particularity of these colours and their sombre flatness, partly as a consequence of using matt acrylic and carbon-based media, but also partly because the contrasts from shocks of green or white dramatise the visual experience. There is a poignant physicality conveyed by the use of media like strips of brown glued-paper tapes giving precise straight edges, and the incisive decisions to paint an apparently discrepant strike through a design solution, which conveys the exuberant damage and the depicted energy of the experiences of the landscape and painting facture; a physicality that is given to the viewer to develop and resolve. There is an exciting shift from contemplation to meditation and back again; a shift from the situated physical experiences inside of where and when you are, to the internalised processes as you articulate those experiences.

[The web site: <http://www.geoffreyolsen.com/2012/03/private-view-geoffrey-olsen-before-the-window/> can be checked for the works involved in this response: *Merthyr Run* (1981-82, acrylic on paper, 34 x 37"), *Before the Window* (1981, 38 x 38") and *Through Cyfatha* (1982, acrylic on various papers on hardboard, 31.5 x 42.25").]