

The Valleys Re-presented

The Tramshed

1 – 31 May 2013

The Valleys Re-presented is a major exhibition of works that brings together contemporary, historical and vernacular photography of the South Wales' Valleys. Photographer and Valleys resident, Helen Matthews, gives a personal response to the work and reflections of the area's communities and histories.

I chose to write about *The Valleys Re-presented* exhibition because it evoked feelings of my youth; having grown up a child of the 70's in the Valleys, I can identify with a lot of the photographic images.

The Valleys project covers such a great diverse and captivating range of subjects, from the demise of the mining communities, infrastructure and the industrialised landscapes to the wild flamboyant film by Jeremy Deller. I found this film, "So many ways to hurt you, the life and times of Adrian Street", enthralling, entertaining and completely bizarre.

I knew absolutely nothing about Adrian Street prior to this film and it brought both laughter and intrigue; I just could not stop watching it. A must see film piece!

The Valleys Re-presented photography exhibition is superbly displayed in the disused Victorian building built in 1902 called *The Tramshed*. The environment for the display couldn't have been more perfect with the backdrop of disused Industrial images, machinery and the mechanical atmosphere. The photographic images blend well with the abandoned feeling of the building. Pieces of time mixed with wonderful sentiments.

The photographic images evoke Valleys life as it was, communities living in a changing time, the social conditions of mining neighbourhoods and the impact of the pit closures depicted through the beautiful stark Black & White images.

I particularly like Paul Reas' photographic works depicting the new industries set up in the Valleys after the demise of mining. The witty signage in several of his images compels you to think about the changing situations these families faced at the time- new factories, new opportunities and new challenges.

But saving my favourite until last, David Bailey's contrasting images of the Welsh urban landscape produce a dark and broody sense of the area's history. Living in the Rhondda Valley, I recognise the locations reflected in these images, which capture not only the immediate environments, but also an awareness and appreciation of the surroundings. The intensity of the images is almost a reminder of time stood still. The Rhondda area doesn't look much different today, and unfortunately, the signs of poverty, deterioration and abandoned sites are still a big part of community life. I wonder if David bailey would also think this is the case.

A fantastic historical exhibition from photographers David Bailey, Mike Berry, John Davies, Peter Fraser, Ron McCormick, Francesca Odell, Paul Reas, Roger Tiley, William Tsui.

Helen Matthews

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