

*Diolch yn fawr Oliver, a diolch i chi am eich holl waith wrth baratoi'r arddangosfa ardderchog hon.*

On behalf of our family I want to say how grateful we are to Oliver Fairclough and his colleagues for putting on this fine exhibition. It is the culmination of some four years of discussion with a range of partners around Wales about a significant exhibition of Jonah Jones's work. It is appropriate for it to be in Cardiff, where Jonah lived and worked for the last 13 years of his life, and in the premier gallery of Wales.

I feel sure we all agree that Jonah Jones made an important contribution to the arts in Wales in the second half of the 20th century.

During his early career in the 1950s Jonah was one of literally a handful of artists in Wales who could make a living out of art. It seems strange to say this of a time that's only 60 years ago, but Jonah was indeed an exception. During those 60 years he developed not just into a substantial artist but a significant *Welsh* artist.

Although born in the North East of England, Jonah took Wales to his heart. The country was pivotal both to his life and his art, informing his work profoundly and recurrently.

This show reflects that. For example, you will see the impact of the work of David Jones on Jonah's sense of Welshness and on his lettering. You will see it too in his preoccupation with Welsh landscape and myth.

I think you will also see it in his lifelong devotion to the Word in all its forms. The Welsh love to communicate, and most of all they love to talk! There seems

something quintessentially Welsh therefore about an obsession with the Word — which is the focus of this exhibition.

After Jonah died, his family set up Scene & Word, a non-profit company with charitable aims, to commemorate his life and work and protect and promote his legacy. One aim was to stage an exhibition that would do justice to Jonah's art. This show realises that aim.

A second aim was to help where we could to conserve and sustain Jonah's surviving public art — sculpture, glass, mosaic and inscriptions — by offering moral, practical and sometimes financial support where it is needed. Like many of us, some of Jonah's work is starting to show signs of age. Budgets both public and private are ever more stretched. It is not surprising, then, that some of the work is at moderate to severe risk.

Only recently we heard the sad news that the last surviving *dalle de verre* window from the great set of four windows in the dome of the Church of the English Martyrs, Rugby, had been removed and replaced with plain glass. The windows were found to be unsafe, and I do not suppose they will ever be seen again.

The most high-profile case on which we have been working for several years has been that of *Y Bont* (The Bridge), the great wall sculpture on themes from *The Mabinogi* that Jonah created for the students' block at Coleg Harlech, which has been acquired by a developer. I am pleased, and rather proud, to tell you that the sculpture has been expertly removed by a team comprising Jonah's old colleague, the sculptor Meic Watts, and Alun Adams and his team of conservation experts from the Architectural Glass Centre at Swansea Metropolitan University. Not only did they get all of the more than 800 pieces

of the sculpture safely off the wall, but they also recorded the exact position of each piece so that the whole vast jigsaw can be reassembled in the future. This, by any standards, is a tremendous result, and we must be grateful to Coleg Harlech for being such a supportive partner. We have also been led to believe, and now we must hope, that the developer will find room to accommodate the sculpture in a public area in a large hotel they propose to develop on an adjacent plot. We shall have to see. For, of course, the next challenge is to find a home for *Y Bont* somewhere in Wales. So if anyone has any alternative idea or suggestion, this would be a very good time to come forward...

Very briefly, the third important aim I want to mention is in the future to put together one or two modest bursaries with which we can help young artists to make a start in their careers, like Jonah in the 1950s.

In 2010 Scene & Word published a limited-edition collectors' set of products by and about Jonah, called *An Artist's Life in Wales*. The idea was not only to commemorate but also to raise funds towards the objectives we've just been talking about.

The set included three fine prints from watercolours by Jonah in our family's collection and a delightful new book, *The Gregynog Journals*, based on early volumes from the daily journals and artist's sketchbooks Jonah kept until the end of his life. These ones record the year he spent as fellow (or artist-in-residence) at Gregynog Hall in Powys, in the early 1980s. The book was designed by David Vickers, former Controller of Gwasg Gregynog (the Gregynog Press), and I had the pleasure and privilege of editing, typesetting and producing it.

Tonight I want to announce the launch of a special offer on the book, not just for Christmas but for the duration of this exhibition. The book is currently available at £130, and we are reducing the price to just £110. If that still sounds expensive, remember that it's a limited edition; each book is hand-bound; although machine-printed the book is produced to very high fine-press standards; and it contains more than 50 superb full-colour reproductions of watercolours and sketches never seen before from the journals, many of them of a very high order of quality. This book is a lovely thing!

We are also including in the offer the CD-Rom from the set, which was produced by Naomi and is jam-packed with content by and about Jonah, including notably many original photographs of Jonah's work by two of the UK's finest professional photographers of fine art: my old friend Stephen Brayne from London, and Wales's very own Robert Greetham. You will see examples of their work projected onto the wall in this exhibition.

In addition we are including Jonah's classic walking guide, *The Lakes of North Wales*, published in its third edition by Y Lolfa. So all in all, ladies and gentlemen, we have truly put together a bargain offer! If you are interested in this offer or in any of the three prints, or you just want to get in touch, you'll find details of how to contact us in the exhibition.

*Diolch yn fawr am dod allan heno.* Thank you for coming tonight. And now I would like to hand you back to John Williams-Davies, Director of Collections and Research of Amgueddfa Cymru, the National Museum of Wales.