

Prynhawn dda. Cyn dechrau, gaf i esbonio na fyddaf yn siarad drosof fy hun y prynhawn yma, ond i'm teulu: fy chwaer Naomi, fy mrawd Pedr – a minnau, wrth gwrs.

Croeso i arddangosfa ganmlwyddol Jonah Jones. Mae'n ardderchog i gweld cymaint o chi yma heddiw – gyfeillion hirsefydledig a newydd; bobl oedd yn ffrindiau Jonah, neu ei blant, neu efallai ei wyrion; bobl a weithiodd efo Jonah; bobl sydd wedi casglu ei waith, neu sydd dim ond yn mwynhau'r gwaith...

Good afternoon. Before starting, can I explain that I won't be talking for myself this afternoon but for my family: my sister Naomi, my brother Peter – and myself, of course.

Welcome to this centennial exhibition of Jonah Jones. It's wonderful to see so many of you here today – friends longstanding and new; friends of Jonah, or their children, or maybe grandchildren; people who worked with him; or who have collected Jonah's work or who simply enjoy it...

I shall start with the main event: this wonderful exhibition. Then I'll say a little about Scene & Word, explain what we are to anyone who doesn't know and give some news about what we are up to.

The possibility of this exhibition first came out of the blue in an email to Naomi. It arrived when both our families and other branches of the wider family were staying in a large house in the Andalucian mountains in September 2017. We do this each year, a sort of family house party for a week, usually in North Wales. But after two wet Welsh summers we had all decided to flee to the sun, and that's why we were in Spain. So, the email was from Gwenda Griffith, a trustee of Plas Glyn-y-Weddw and an old friend and former colleague of Naomi at the BBC. That's where the whole thing started. There followed a good deal of shuttling up and down the superhighways of Wales for meetings in Llandaff, Lampeter and here in Llanbedrog, and then lots and lots *and lots* of work. And now, here we all are, 17 months later.

It is quite sobering to think that if Jonah were still with us, he would be a hundred in a few days' time. What brings one up short is to think that he died 15 years ago, and to realise how quickly the world has moved on and pretty much forgotten he ever existed. In the art world there is nothing more unfashionable than the art of the very recent past, which, at this point in the cycle of unfashionability, means the work of those postwar artists whose careers began in the late 1940s or 1950s. Sure, there are the stars whose light never went out: the Moores and Hepworths, your Bacons and Pipers. But the Jonah Joneses of this world, successful enough in their lifetime but whose work touched hundreds rather than millions (and whose earnings also ran to ... hundreds rather than millions...!), have more or less disappeared from public view, for the time being at least. One day, maybe soon, they will begin to pop up on the Antiques Road Show and people will start collecting their work again. But for that to happen, their memory has to be kept out there and their surviving work has to be cherished and preserved.

That's part of the job this exhibition is doing, in Jonah's heartland where he was known and loved by many. For this opportunity I am very grateful to the team at Plas Glyn-y-Weddw, most of all to its director Gwyn Jones, whose extraordinary energy and drive simultaneously inspires and exhausts me, and whose love and devotion for the whole Plas Glyn-y-Weddw project, and its role in the local community of Llanbedrog and the wider community of Llŷn, I really do find inspirational. I also must thank the curators Nia Roberts and Iwan Hughes, who have worked so effectively and creatively with Naomi and Peter to select these exhibits and design and hang this truly amazing show.

One of the great pleasures for me in this exhibition is the refreshingly original idea of inviting other artists to participate who have some historical or thematic link to Jonah. The gallery aptly chose 'Connection' as a collective title for the contributions by Meic Watts and Howard Bowcott, who at one time exhibited in a group with Jonah known as the 'Moelwyn Group', which had just one rule: that there were no rules!); Claire Langdown, David Nash and Sarina de Majo, three more old friends and colleagues of Jonah; and an array of other artists, who look like a football team with a full bench of subs – Vivienne Rickman Poole, Aled Prichard-Jones, Richard Higlett, Simon Callery, Menna Angharad, Chris Bird-Jones, Rob Piercy, Janet Smith, Rachel Stewart and Bill Swann. What these artists all have in common with

Jonah – apart from the football – is a fascination with Llŷn and Gwynedd, its landscape or mythology, culture or history – very much the same things that drove Jonah to make so much of his work from the 1980s onwards.

Above all, I feel that floating everywhere through this exhibition, invisible and untouchable, is what I can only refer to as love. I've already mentioned Gwyn's devotion to this gallery and its community: both things driven by love of place. There are all the participating artists, including Jonah, who all found a way to express, through their imagery, their love of this part of Wales. And love of the whole creative process of bringing something precious back to life seems the only way to explain the extraordinary amount of hard work and dedication that have gone into all kinds of things brought together into this exhibition. I'm thinking of the sculptures so skillfully cleaned and restored by Mark Sawyer on the Trinity St David campus in Lampeter – for example, the two large *Bethel* sculptures, which were in a filthy condition after years spent living outdoors. Or the large *dalle de verre* window, removed with great skill and tenderness from a boarded-up church and brought here by the architectural glass experts Owen Luetchford and Stacey Poultney, with heavy-lifting help from a group known to me only as 'the lads' from Plas Glyn-y-Weddw, and ingeniously mounted on a frame specially built by John Cowtan, the gallery's carpenter. I'm sure it was the fond memory of Jonah and his long friendship with Clough Williams-Ellis, combined with a wider love of belonging in Gwynedd, that convinced Robin Llywelyn and his colleagues at Portmeirion to support this exhibition by so generously sponsoring the stunning catalogue for the show. And, in your various ways, all you collectors, private and public, have generously loaned work to the exhibition out of love, I think, and respect, both for Jonah and for the work of Plas Glyn-y-Weddw.

Coming back to the catalogue, I have to single out Portmeirion for the generosity of their sponsorship. It made it possible to produce something of the highest quality, which we will all want to keep on our shelves and will give pleasure every time it's taken down and handled. As a book designer myself, I am full of admiration for the catalogue design by Olwen Fowler. I also have to praise the text by Peter Jones. He may be my brother and I wouldn't want to puff him up, but fair play, the boy can write a bit, can't he?! So, a big thank you to Portmeirion for enabling all this to happen. Thank you, Robin, *diolch i ti ac i fwrdd Portmeirion*.

As for the whole show, if I had my way, I would invite all the artists involved to rejoin a reconstituted Moelwyn Group – no rules, remember! – and take the whole thing out on tour to every town and city in Wales. What a travelling show it would be.

I will now say something about Scene & Word and make a couple of announcements. For anyone who doesn't know, 'Scene & Word' – 'Scene' spelled as in 'crime scene' – was the typically punning title chosen by Jonah for his last ever exhibition of watercolours, in the former Ceri Richards Gallery of the Taliesin Arts Centre at Swansea University, at the beginning of 2004, which sadly turned out to be the year that he died. We, Jonah's children, chose it as the name for a non-profit company with charitable aims we set up, with others, in 2006 to commemorate and record Jonah's life and work and try to keep alive the values he had stood up for as an artist and educator. Since then, we have published books and prints, created a digital record of the work, built a quite spectacular website, collected a large portfolio of photographs, and cooperated with other organisations to present major exhibitions such as this one.

Just as importantly, we have campaigned with others to try to save major examples of his public art in danger of being ripped down and lost. The particular relevance to this exhibition is that two of our successes are being shown here at Plas Glyn-y-Weddw. The big slab glass window is from the former Catholic church in Morfa Nefyn, now shut and to be sold for redevelopment. It was part of a magnificent set of twelve windows, which, together with a great mosaic of *Christ the Holy Redeemer*, were made by Jonah for the then-new church in 1968. In the campaign to save them we were very grateful for the strong support of members of the local community here in Llŷn, in particular Noel Hulmston; also from

Christopher Catling, secretary of the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales. I'm delighted to see both Noel and Christopher here today. The good news is that the windows and mosaic will be removed from Morfa Nefyn, restored and relocated elsewhere in the Diocese of Wrexham. The windows will go into a newer church in Mold. (In fact, Mold already has the two great wall sculptures by Jonah, representing *Justice* and *Mercy*, in the Law Courts there. So that little town of 10,000 people will soon become a world heritage centre for Jonah Jones!) The window in this show has been loaned by kind permission of Peter Brignall, the Bishop of Wrexham, and the Trustees of the Diocese. We are also indebted to David Hughes of Lawray Architects, Wrexham, who on behalf of the diocese helped to coordinate this rescue project. Most of all can I thank our own Alun Adams, a director of Scene & Word. Formerly the head of the Architectural Glass Centre at the Swansea College of Art in the University of Wales Trinity St David (the university with the very long name!), he is one of the foremost experts on the handling and conservation of leaded and other forms of fine glass. Without his expertise, we would just be a bunch of people shouting in the wilderness about some old artist's stuff. Instead we have on board the skillset to actually achieve something.

Another of our major rescue projects, also directed by Alun, is *Y Bont*, Jonah's huge wall sculpture, which was in the refectory of the former students' block at the old Coleg Harlech. The last time I drove past, the students' block was still there, empty and in a fine old mess. *Y Bont*, I'm happy to say, is long gone, all 800 bits of it painstakingly taken out, numbered and marked up on a plan, and transported to the Lampeter campus of the university with the very long name, where it is safely stored awaiting restoration somewhere – hopefully in Wales, and maybe, who knows, on the campus itself, about which we are still in an ongoing conversation with the university. A couple of the larger pieces from *Y Bont* have been brought from Lampeter for this exhibition, and it's lovely to see them out and about in public once again.

I'll conclude by making two announcements about Scene & Word. The first concerns not quite a new book but an important new edition of a book by Jonah. In 2010, Scene & Word published *The Gregynog Journals*, based on two volumes of daily journals he kept in 1981–82 when he was the artist in residence at Gregynog Hall in Powys. It's a fascinating diary of a year in a working artist's life, with many previously unseen watercolour sketches and cartoons, beautifully reproduced in full colour, and with a fine introduction by the poet Wynn Wheldon. It was originally published as a limited edition in a handbound hardback format. Left over, we had in storage several boxes of the printed pages of the edition. Recently we found the funds to rejacket them in paperback format to be sold at just £20, which is a fraction of the original sale cost. You can buy a numbered book from the shop here in the gallery or order direct from Scene & Word. I can promise that every pound you spend will be used in a worthwhile cause!

I have here three copies of *The Gregynog Journals*, which it's a great pleasure to offer as gifts to the people at Plas Glyn-y-Weddw with whom we have worked most closely: Gwyn, Nia and Iwan. *Diolch yn fawr i chi i gyd: yr ydych wedi bod yn wych*. Thank you all very much: you have been wonderful.

By the way, another recent book by Jonah, which you can also find in the shop here, is *Dear Mona: Letters from a Conscientious Objector*, a collection of letters expertly edited by my brother Peter and published just a few weeks ago by Seren Books. It's a uniquely original and personal contribution to the historical record of World War Two and the tumultuous immediate aftermath in Palestine, where Jonah was stationed and where he met our mother, Judith.

Final announcement. The longstanding five directors of Scene and Word – Naomi, Peter, Alun, me and Anne Price-Owen, the Research & Postgraduate Tutor at the Swansea College of Art – were recently joined by the next generation: two of Jonah's grandchildren, Naomi's son Daniel Trodden and my son Robin Ritter-Jones. As well as bringing a breath of youthful fresh air and new ideas to the table, they are also digital natives – well, at least Robin is. I gather that Dan prefers to browse the low-hanging fruit of the Analogue World, which doesn't stop him having plenty of original digital ideas. For example,

he recently suggested we film fly-through explorations of some of Jonah's sculptures. That's a neat idea, and certainly worth a look, and if anyone here knows someone with relevant expertise, please find Dan and have a chat with him about it. And Robin has been busy building a new Facebook page for Scene & Word, which he plans to follow up with further social media developments on Twitter, Instagram and so on. Basically, the idea is to reach out to a new younger audience, and hopefully develop an online shop where we can sell books, prints etc to raise further funds for Scene & Word's work. So, can I invite you all to type 'Scene & Word' into your Facebook search box, 'like' the page and the various things already published on it, and then, going forward, keep a watchful eye on the page and become an active member of the Scene & Word online community. Those mysterious algorithms respond to increasing footfall on a page by making it more and more publicly prominent, which is exactly what we need to do. Every time you visit our Facebook page, you'll be helping us to reach more people. All of us have to look to the future, even old folk such as me!

A rwan mae'n bleser mawr a braint gen i ddatgan bod yr arddangosfa ar agor.
And now it's my great pleasure and privilege to declare the exhibition open.