



Swansea University
Prifysgol Abertawe

MA in Creative Writing

Find out more about our unique programme, experienced writers and wide range of writing genres



www.swansea.ac.uk/ 01792 606752

WALES ARTS **review**

[ARTICLES](#)[REVIEWS](#)[INTERVIEWS](#)[CATEGORIES ▼](#)[WHAT'S ON ▼](#)[SEARCH ...](#)

Join our friends' scheme and support Wales' premier digital platform for cultural debate

[SUBSCRIBE](#)

DATE: **22.01.19** WRITTEN BY: **PAUL BUTLER** POSTED IN: **ARTICLES, RECOMMENDED, VISUAL ARTS**



EXHIBITION | INDEFINITY BY LINDA JANE JAMES

Paul Butler explores the latest postmodern exhibition by **Linda Jane James**, *Indefinity*, at *Aberystwyth Arts Centre* ahead of its opening.

I sit in Linda Jane James' studio and contemplate her joyful chaotic exuberant art-work *INDEFINITY* as it nears completion. This 6m x 3m mixed media collage, made specifically for the **Oriel Piazza window at Aberystwyth Arts Centre**, has taken nearly a year to realise and will be on show from 1st March to 6th May 2019. The work will have a day and night incarnation – daylight augmented by tungsten spots

– but as daylight turns to dusk the lights changing to coloured LEDs, giving the whole window the mesmerising feel of the fairground.



Linda Jane James' response to the challenge of making a piece for the window has been to create a complex, contradictory, layered piece of work which defies categorisation. It is an immensely ambitious art-work which works formally – as an organisation of colours shapes and materials on a large scale; conceptually – as a statement about time, value, entropy; and emotionally.

The initial impact of this work seems to speak of modernist abstraction, its rhythms and 'all-overness' seemingly conforming to Greenbergian formalism. But it soon becomes apparent that it is far from it. In fact, it is the fall-out from a series of collisions between the detritus of consumer culture – vinyl, paper fragments of all kinds, industrial tapes and packaging materials, bin end and surplus vinyl wallpaper, reflective materials from greetings cards, sweet wrappers, and mirrors, reflecting back to us the materials that package our lives too readily discarded. Within this one work one can see upwards of twenty potential paintings or collages, each of which might stand alone. But as the chaos gradually subsides all these contradictory elements are reconciled and the work's totality asserts itself, as I am drawn into the internal irrational logic of the piece.

In the creative act, the artist goes from intention to realisation through a chain of totally subjective reactions. His struggle toward the realisation is a series of efforts, pains, satisfactions, refusals, decisions, which also cannot and must not be fully self-conscious, at least on the aesthetic plane.

The result of this struggle is a difference between intention and its realisation, a difference which the artist is not aware of. Consequently, in the chain reactions accompanying the creative act, a link is missing. This

gap which represents the inability of the artist to express fully his intention; this difference between what he intended to realise and did realise, is the personal 'art coefficient' contained in the work'.

Marcel Duchamp

Thesis, antithesis, synthesis. *Indefinity* takes many contradictory elements – material, colour, idea – and creates a dynamic whole from them. It is a work that has resulted from the disparity between what is imagined, planned, hoped for, and what the work is. It is about acceptance – reconciliation. It is both a critique and a celebration. It simultaneously expresses her sense of being overwhelmed by overproduction and the mismatch between supply and demand, excess and inefficiency which is the consequence of the capitalism's greed and hunger for ever greater



growth and expansion. Yet she celebrates stuff – material. She loves vinyl, shiny tape copper wire, string. She is a democrat in the material world who champions the right of all material to coexist. She is not a 'Truth to Material' snob who valorises clay and bronze – she is a true Post-modernist.

And I could go further. Linda Jane James' seems to challenge notions of value, and the way value is created. The work seems to reflect the current atomisation of values – the explosive deconstructive forces of postmodern ideas and fake news, relativism and uncertainty. Her work accepts and celebrates chaos – and relishes the making/painting process whereby she achieves a reconciliation and synthesis of all her disparate and contradictory materials and processes within the rectangle.

Linda Jane James loves the state of 'lying aroundness'. She searches for the stuff

that lies in a state of worthlessness, leftover, not valued, surplus to requirements, of dubious quality – not yet buried, burned or recycled. All these bits of stuff, each with their own identity and history are subsumed into this beautiful whole. There is no hierarchy, Linda breathes life into all these materials and allows them to speak with an equal voice.



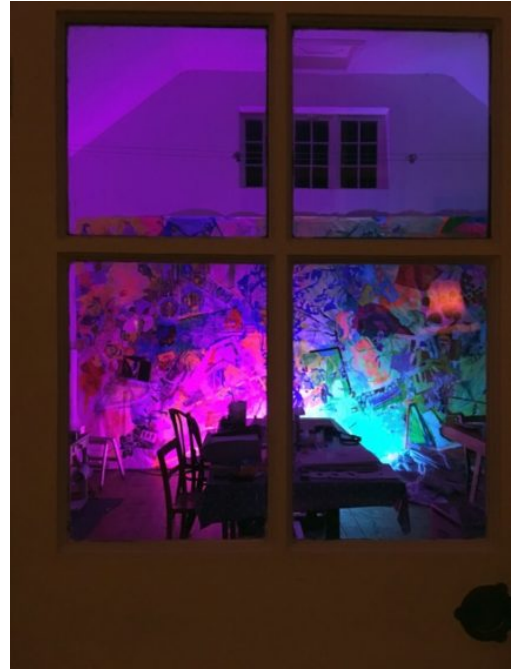
James wanders through cities, along beaches, across the countryside picking up, or recording through drawing and photography, discarded fragments and objects. Stuff that defies categorisation, bits unidentifiable whose

former purpose might only be guessed at – an odd piece of plastic, a bit of a broken toy, a car part, a buckle, something crushed by passing traffic, battered by the weather, eroded by time. Linda has a compassion for the abandoned, a need to rescue materials from oblivion. And she hates waste! This stuff is after all material which might actually be useful. But it is never merely material. She is not recycling or up-cycling – she is transforming these meaningless bits of stuff into meaningful bits of stuff through a process of transubstantiation – a metamorphosis of an almost religious kind. Or perhaps the analogy is alchemy.

What a waste, what a waste. It's all for nothing. All careers end in failure. All love ends in tragedy. That is what makes us all fetishists. I take a long last look at my father's body, the familiar blemish on his cheek the smell of his jacket. Around his neck, tucked beneath his shirt was an extraordinary necklace made of string and fine chains to which were tied many little objects – old coins stones locket bits of indeterminate material, a little scrap of paper on which something hand-written could just be discerned, a small ball of wool, bits of bent wire, little chains – his life, that he always carried with him, around his neck. James keeps my father's necklace

as an inspiration.

Life is elusive. Our need to grasp and hold onto it is understandable. We have a very powerful need to ascribe meaning – to know what a thing *is*. The psychological difficulty in adjusting to our very minor role in the infinitely regenerative process of life is considerable, and gives rise to a very profound and urgent desire to see life as dramatic, our lives as stories, and the things we surround ourselves with as deeply meaningful. Linda Jane James, in a sense, deconstructs this process. Consciously and unconsciously she tells us that things do not have intrinsic meaning – a chair is just a word. But perhaps comfortingly she also tells us that all things – like all human beings – have value. So even an apparently inconsequential scrap has dignity. We ascribe value – create meaning – as we do with life itself.



Good art deals with this deep stuff. It asks: what is it to be human? what is it to be? what is it? We will of course never find the answer. As Marcel Duchamp said, there is no solution, because there is no problem.

Linda Jane James' exhibition, Indefinity, runs from 1st March to 6th May 2019 at Aberystwyth Arts Centre.

SHARE



FURTHER READING

RECOMMENDED

VISUAL ARTS | MEIRION GINSBERG AT ORIEL TEGFRYN



VISUAL ARTS | WE CAN ONLY SEE TODAY

[Visual Arts](#) | 01.02.19

[Visual Arts](#) | 24.01.19



OUR BEST REVIEWS OF 2018

[Film & TV](#) | 30.12.18



OUR BEST INTERVIEWS OF 2018

[Literature](#) | 27.12.18



BEST OF 2018 – OUR NUMBER ONES

[Digital](#) | 21.12.18



WELSH VISUAL ARTS – THE BEST OF 2018

[Visual Arts](#) | 20.12.18



Visual Arts | 09.12.18

Visual Arts | 09.12.18

YOU MAY ALSO LIKE

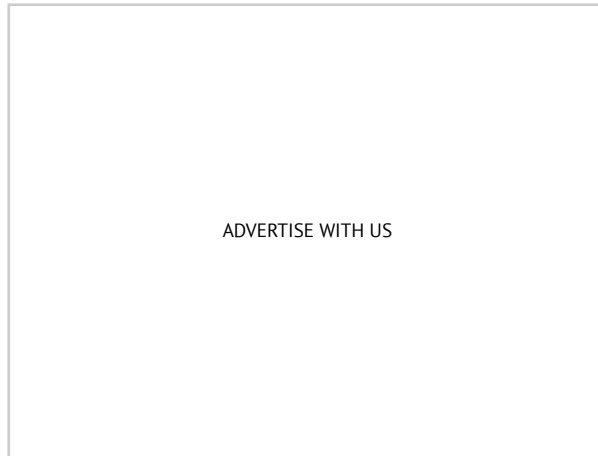
RECOMMENDED



Visual Arts | 01.02.19

Visual Arts | 01.02.19





ADVERTISE WITH US

ENTER YOUR EMAIL TO BE THE FIRST TO GET ALL THE LATEST NEWS FROM WALES ARTS REVIEW

(We never pass on your details to anyone else).

Enter email...

SIGNUP

**ABOUT 2 HOURS
AGO**

"Colour. Vibrant colour. The walls of Meirion Ginsberg's solo show [...] are hung with paintings whose vividness is... twitter.com/i/web/status/10912...

31.01.19 8:30 AM

"That attitude was ideal...The wholeheartedness of those students was amazing." - Eddie Ladd (@GwenithOwen) chats... twitter.com/i/web/status/10908...



[HOME](#)

[THE BIG READ](#)

[A.I.R.](#)

[ABOUT US](#)

[LIBRARY](#)

[FRIENDS' SCHEME](#)

[SPONSORS & FUNDING PARTNERS](#)

[SUPPORT US](#)

[CONTACT](#)

All content by **Wales Arts Review** ©2019
Baked by **Virtual Pudding**