

John Addyman
A Sense of Place
English and Welsh Landscapes

MONNOW VALLEY ARTS CENTRE

5. April 2011





ILLUSTRATIONS

Front cover: cat. no. 23

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Above: John Addyman. Portrait by Nigel Henderson

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John Addyman

1929–2006

A Sense of Place
English and Welsh Landscapes

Foreword by Harriet Addyman

Introduction by Nicholas Elam

20 September – 2 November 2008

MONNOW VALLEY ARTS CENTRE

Monnow Valley Arts Centre, Middle Hunt House,
Walterstone, nr Abergavenny, Herefordshire HR2 0DY

+44 (0)1873 860 529

Email info@monnowvalleyarts.org www.monnowvalleyarts.org

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FOREWORD

John Addyman was born in Wallasey, Merseyside, in 1929. His mother was Welsh from Mold, Flintshire, and he was evacuated to Wales during the war. In the immediate post-war period he studied at Wallasey School of Art, where there was a tradition of war artists' work and English graphics, and then at the Royal College of Art, London, where he was taught illustration by Paul Nash, Edward Bawden and Minton, amongst others.

After he left the Royal College of Art in 1952 he became interested in the coastal rocks at Rest Bay, Porthcawl (his family having moved to Port Talbot in 1950) and produced a large drawing of the rocks for a Welsh Arts Council exhibition, which was purchased by the Steel Company of Wales. Early interest in his work was shown by David Bell, the then curator of the Glyn Vivian Gallery Swansea, who heralded this work as 'Welsh School of Painting' in the *Western Mail*, and included an illustration of the large watercolour drawing in his book, *The Artist in Wales*, of c. 1953.

After leaving Wales for Colchester in 1955, Addyman taught at Colchester School of Art until 1963 but retained contact with Wales throughout this period with the Howard Roberts Gallery in

Cardiff and through the National Museum of Wales, who acquired a second work, 'Coast at Ogmore', around that time. In Colchester Addyman met Nicholas Elam, who was at that time at New College, Oxford, eventually becoming Ambassador to Luxembourg. He organised an exhibition in the College in his capacity as President of the Oxford University Art Society and so began his collection of Addyman's work.

Another meaningful association created by the move to Colchester was with the artist John Nash. Addyman became his teaching assistant on two occasions at a summer school in Abingdon, Berkshire, close to John and Paul Nash's family home. He also spent time with him and students at Flatford Mill Field Study Centre.

John Addyman inevitably became involved in the changes taking place in the Art School world in the early 60s. After meeting Nigel Henderson of 'Independent Group' fame, who was visiting tutor at Colchester, Addyman developed ideas in clay associated with rock forms and produced some work in the medium as large ceramic panels, one of which is now in the National Museum of Wales collection.

John Addyman was invited to join the Fine Art Department of the then Nottingham College of Art (prior to their application for degree courses). This led to an interest in sculpture and to the application of ceramic cladding to buildings. Several works of this nature were produced including a large mural for a factory in Liverpool, designed by Madeline Addyman, and a panel for Abijan University in West Africa.

During this period and subsequent years John Addyman continued to record ideas with a rather esoteric medium, watercolour, and although he assimilated much in East Anglia – being latterly involved in a television assessment of ‘Constable Country in the 80s’ – he worked with watercolour throughout his life yet felt he never lost his Welsh root as a painter. Addyman always said he came alive ‘visually’ in Wales, and it was this strength that produced some iconic work with the East Anglian landscape.

John Addyman has shown work in the New Art Centre, London, and in Colchester, Nottingham, Liverpool, Ipswich, Gainsborough’s House in Suffolk, Antwerp and Luxembourg, in addition to Wales. Exhibitions stimulate a strong interest, partly from links with important artists of the 50s and 60s – many of whom were close friends such as Edward Middleditch and Nigel Henderson – but also because his work retained much of the flavour for which there is still a considerable audience in language, his work developing ideas in his chosen medium of watercolour and ceramic.

Developments from Addyman’s work have led to significant purchases for collections and outstanding success in the residency in Luxembourg, with works being purchased by major institutions in Luxembourg and also for the Government Art Collection in Britain, residencies in the Republic of Ireland at the Ballinglen Foundation in County Mayo, and a major prize in the Singer Firedlander/*Sunday Times* competition in 1998.

Addyman’s work developed with renewed contact with Wales where he returned to live permanently in 1989. He retained his early enthusiasm for the rocks and coastal landscape – the elemental experience that gave strength to the work with landscape on the opposite side of Britain – and this interest also led to his enquiry into the nature of perception in landscape and his interest in 18th-century artists who first came to Wales – Cornelius Varley, Turner and of course Girtin and others.

It is of interest that John Addyman was looking forward to time working in the Black Mountains, and it would seem a loss to us that his particular vision and perception was not able to interact here with this landscape found around the Monnow Valley Arts Centre. John Addyman died in June 2006 and will surely be remembered as one of the great Welsh/British artists of our time.

Harriet Addyman



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INTRODUCTION

I bought my first drawing by John Addyman when I was still a schoolboy, from his first one-man exhibition at the Minories, in Colchester. It was large, about 16in by 32in, a landscape study in pencil. It was an informal piece, not highly finished, done out of doors, not in the studio. It showed – suggested rather than depicted – a thicket rising from a fold in the ground in the resolutely unspectacular Essex landscape, probably of Friday Wood, near Colchester. There was something about the way the sketchy delineation of trees and undergrowth suggested a relationship with the land from which they grew that seemed to represent a reality beyond the merely pictorial. It was anti-picturesque. It caught the value of something quite ordinary. It was about how landscape really is, without the starting point having been chosen for some sublime or theatrical effect. Yet there was something more there than just the appearance.

In those days, in the late 50s, John was already a keen disciple of Constable – by no means a fashionable preoccupation at the time. He understood what Constable meant about ‘truth’ in painting landscape: not absolute topographical exactitude, but fidelity to the way landscape appears in reality. He became a

passionate protagonist of Constable against Turner in this respect, because of Turner’s persistent imposition on landscape of some sublime or theatrical character. John’s approach was to get into a relationship with a landscape he knew well and make marks on paper that were a response to how he perceived the landscape and the space in and around it to be. This may seem rather obvious, indeed common to many painters. But in the case of a water-colourist the point perhaps needs making because the notion of ‘watercolour painting’ is often associated with something more pictorial. John was creating works that were more like objects in themselves than images.

Whatever his preference in the matter, it is rather difficult to leave Turner out when talking about John’s work, because his technique seems so redolent of Turner. Like Turner, John used watercolour in the purest way, to achieve something only watercolour can do: to suggest form through a series of washes of colour, using the edge of a wash to suggest line – whether the soft edge made by one wash overlapping another or finishing on the paper, or the hard edge made by a concentration of fugitive pigment (a device he took further than Turner, as he did that of

leaving areas of paper unpainted). We have found on going through John's things some wonderful life studies done entirely this way, every line being established or suggested by edges of wash – not a millimetre of drawing anywhere. They are magical, and utterly of our time.

I am not sure whether Turner reworked by wetting the painted surface and applying different pigment, as John was wont to, but John had one trick I am fairly sure Turner never used. Once my wife Helen, Madeline Addyman and I spent most of an evening trying to convince John that a particular painting was fine, finished and done, and should be left alone, only to discover the following morning that he had taken it in the bath with him and given it a jolly good scrub.

John of course responded to the influence of artists of the 20th century. There are delightful echoes in some of his work of British painters of the immediate pre-war period – of Wyndham Lewis, for example, and of Edward Burra in some of the faces in John's early street scenes. He himself said he was much influenced by the War Artists; and he mentions surrealism and the art of the found object as having influenced him more subliminally. But he became very mistrusting of the words 'abstract' and 'abstraction' as applied to his work. It is hard to avoid those words if one wants to describe John's work in a way that conveys a sense of its essentially contemporary idiom. I am inclined to describe his paintings as 'abstract landscapes', while adding that the presence of the landscape as an inspiration was more important to him

than the abstraction. He hated any suggestion that what he was doing might be somehow formulaic, a reduction of landscape to some other reality of the mind.

In fact John had a slightly ambivalent relationship with out-and-out modernism: he wanted to be considered a part of it, but he did not want to give up his vision, his personal language. He was of course the natural successor to his friend and mentor, John Nash, in the English watercolour landscape tradition. But he carried abstraction much further than Nash. He painted on a much larger scale than Nash (or any watercolourist before him that I know of). And although his work shows some affinity with Nash's, you would not mistake one for the other.

Latterly, John was tempted to describe himself as 'Post Modernist'; but I was not too happy about that because of the sense of archness, pretension, even irony that expression seems to suggest, none of them characteristics of John's work at all.

Occasionally, fashion would combine with John's intention to produce a superb result. There are paintings done in the early Sixties where John has used the then fashionable 'dribble' technique to devastating effect in suggesting light rain or drizzle: he does not represent rain, but he suggests it, in a way that is as much about capturing the feeling of the damp air in the spaces in the landscape as it is about conveying a sense of the way our perception of the natural features themselves – trees, hedges and so on – becomes less solid in conditions like drizzle. Their looming presence is of shades rather than solids, and in the space

between them we can feel the wet as if we were standing in it. It is wholly contemporary painting in terms of idiom, but it achieves the sort of effect Constable would have approved, with a technique Turner would have recognised.

In the latter part of his career John returned to Wales and resumed his study of the Welsh landscape and notably its

coastline. He made the rocks grow from the sea the way he had made hedges grow from the land, a secret conjunction between the elements creating form, and he played with the light the way the light played with the landscape itself.

Nick Elam



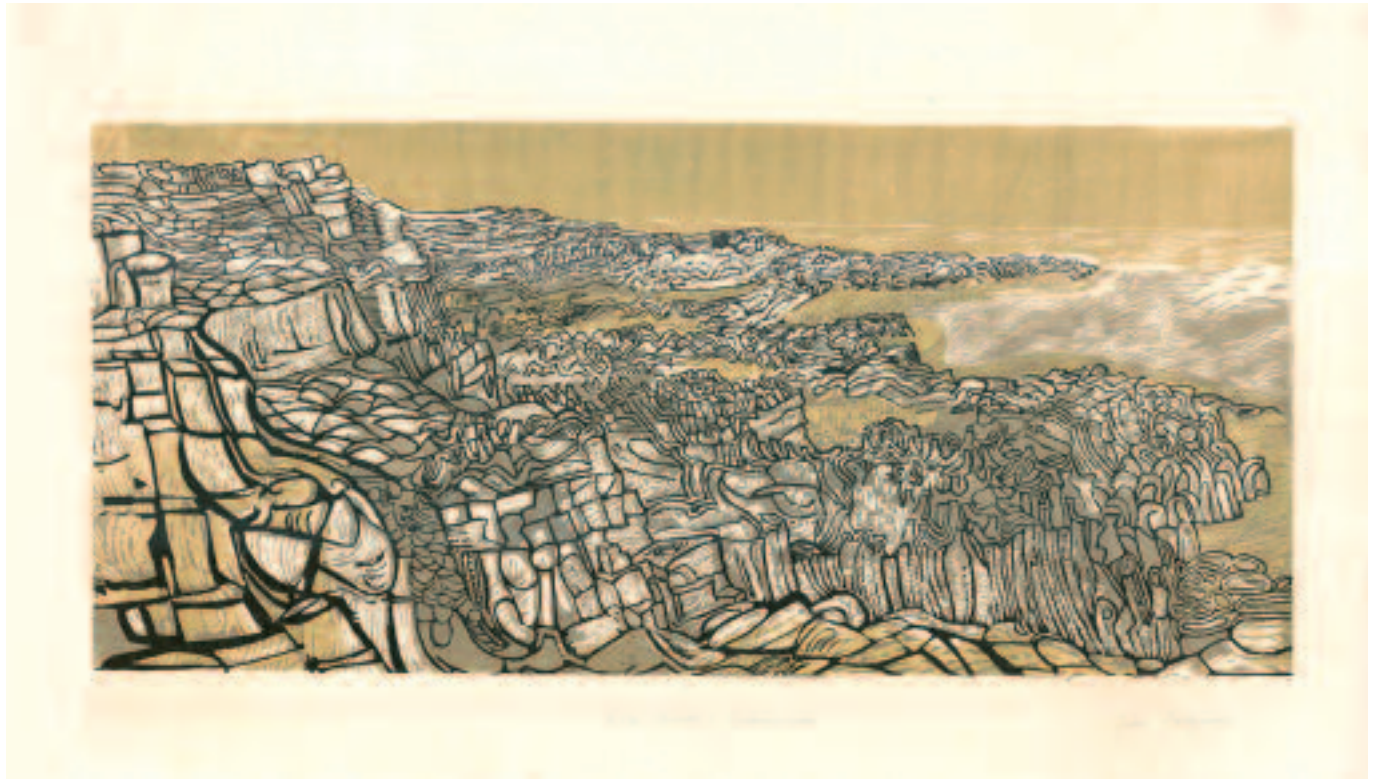
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CATALOGUE

1. **Rocks and Sea**, 1954
Linocut, 50 × 40.6 cm
2. **Rock Scene, Glamorgan**, 1959
Linocut, 91 × 53 cm
3. **Rocks and Sea**, 1959
Linocut, 91 × 71 cm
4. **Ogmore, Glamorgan**, 1976
Watercolour, 99 × 68 cm
5. **Aldeburgh Boat**, 1984
Watercolour, 99 × 68 cm
6. **River Reflection, Stour**, 1984
Watercolour, 102 × 68 cm
7. **Early & Late**, 1986
Watercolour, 104 × 71 cm
8. **Poppet**, 1990
Monoprint, 66 × 99 cm
9. **Cilgerran Castle**, 1996
Watercolour, 137 × 78 cm
10. **Gwndwn**, 1996
Watercolour, 38 × 28 cm
11. **Ogmore**, 1997
Watercolour, 134 × 78 cm
12. **View from Gwndwn**, 1998
Watercolour, 33 × 25 cm
13. **Llangranog**, 1998
Watercolour, 102 × 43 cm
14. **Inhabited Rocks**, 1998
Watercolour, 137 × 78 cm
15. **Preselli**, 2000
Watercolour, 137 × 78 cm
16. **Celtic Coast II**, 2000
Watercolour, 91 × 66 cm
17. **Preselli**, 2000
Watercolour, 33 × 25 cm
18. **Non Objective**, 2000
Watercolour, 33 × 25 cm
19. **Land and Sea**, 2001
Watercolour, 28 × 23 cm
20. **Dawn Breaks Behind the Eyes**, 2002
Watercolour, 99 × 68 cm
21. **Hannahs Cliff**, 2002
Watercolour, 91 × 66 cm
22. **Irish Boat**, 2004
Watercolour, 61 × 46 cm
23. **Tide and Light**, 2000–4
Watercolour, 38 × 28 cm
Series of six watercolours



Cat. no. 2



Cat. no. 3



Cat. no. 7



Cat. no. 12



Cat. no. 15



Cat. no. 17



Cat. no. 21



Cat. no. 23

BIOGRAPHY

JOHN ADDYMAN A.R.C.A.

b. 1929 Wallasey, Merseyside
d. 2006 Narberth, Pembrokeshire
Wallasey School of Art 1946–49
Royal College of Art 1949–52

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

1955 New Art Centre, London
1958 Minorities, Colchester, Essex
1967 Wivenhoe Arts Centre, Essex
1973 Oriel Bangor, Welsh Arts Council
1975 Aldeburgh Festival
1980 Fitzroy Gallery, London
1986 Christchurch Mansion, Ipswich
1989/97/2001/05 Chappel Galleries, Essex
1991 Gainsborough's House, Suffolk
1992 Bury St Edmunds Art Gallery 'The Elements'
1998 Institute of Physics, London
2000 t'Elzenveld, Antwerp
2003 Layers of Perception, Welsh Arts Council Touring show
2005 Chappel Galleries
2006 Salem Chapel, Hay on Wye Literary Festival
2008 Monnow Valley Arts Centre

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

1953 Arts Council of Wales
1954 South Wales Group
1963 Contemporary Arts Society for Wales
1965 London Group
1968 Howard Roberts Gallery, Cardiff
1969 New Grafton Gallery, London
1971 University of Essex
1974 Gainsborough's House, selection of work
1976 Eisteddfod, Cardigan Dyfed, prizewinner
1980 Compass Gallery, Glasgow
1984 Playhouse Gallery, Harlow
1989 Aberystwyth Arts Centre
1981 A survey of influential East Anglian Artists, Chapel Galleries Essex
1993 'Gwndwn' Proteus Sculpture Network
1995 Korschthuis 'Beim Engel' Luxembourg
1997 'Landscape and Recollection', R.H.A. Gallery, Dublin
1998 'Artists from Britain' British Council, t'elzenveld Antwerp
1998 Walberswick, Post War to Present, Chappel Galleries, Essex
1999 Welsh Watercolour Society
2001 Federesky Gallery, Belfast
2002 National Trust at Dinefwr, Llandeilo
2002 Van Milo Gallery, Antwerp

AWARDS

- 1998 Fellow of Ballinglen Arts Foundation, Co Mayo
- 1999 Invited as a member of Welsh Watercolour Society
- 2000 Regional Prizewinner, The Hunting Art Prize, London

COLLECTIONS INCLUDE

- National Museum of Wales
- Coleg Normel, Bangor
- Welsh Arts Council
- City of Newport
- British Embassy, Luxembourg
- City of Coventry
- Christchurch Museum, Ipswich
- Anglia Television
- Chelmsford and Essex Museum
- r'Elzenveld Antwerp
- Nottinghamshire County Council
- Essex County Council
- Fleming Fund Management
- Balliol College, Oxford
- Steel Company of Wales
- Gainsborough's House, Suffolk
- Government Art Collection
- Suffolk County Council
- Luxembourg City Museum
- University of Wales, Aberystwyth



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