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Review

Cerith Wyn Evans review - lose yourself in broken windcreens and neon scribbles

★★★★☆

Mostyn gallery, Llandudno, Wales

The longer you stay the more there is to experience in this giddy, transporting exhibition that comes with a dash of danger



'I think of a mad scientist's blackboard' ... Cerith Wyn Evans's major solo exhibition at Mostyn, Wales.

Photograph: Jason Roberts/Courtesy the artist and White Cube.

Adrian Searle

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“**N**eon in daylight is a great pleasure”, wrote Frank O’Hara in one of his celebrated poems, written on his lunch break from the Museum of Modern Art in New York. So it is for Cerith Wyn Evans, whose entanglements of white neon hang beneath the skylights at Mostyn gallery. Llandudno is not Times Square, but I feel suspended too, buoyed-up among the effervescent neon and fitful autumn sunlight. The air is quietly humming, and a barely detectable, distant music is resonating through a nearby arrangement of glass sheets, slung from the rafters like a little head height maze. Small contact speakers are attached to the panes of glass, making them vibrate, amplifying the sound of the artist at the piano, recorded in two sessions a decade apart. With the glissandos and the staccatos, the reflections and refractions of the neon also come and go as you move between the panes. You learn to tread carefully here, standing still and walking between the galleries. The longer you stay, the more there is to experience.

Large mobiles sway but barely turn in the air currents. Their dangling, canted planes are repurposed car and truck windcreens. Each one is cracked by a traffic shunt or breaker’s yard carelessness, or bulls-eyed by the impact of a stone thrown up from the road. They sway and swing high up towards the roof, and hang at odd angles from their beams at eye-level and down towards the floor. As they move, they give us bulging, distorted reflections of the tall columns of lights among which they hang. These lighted columns don’t quite touch the floor either. I’m reminded of one of the little anecdotes John Cage retold in his book *Silence*: a Buddhist monk asks his teacher what difference he would feel when he attained enlightenment. “No difference,” the master tells him, “except the feet are a little bit off the ground.”

Unenlightened in this floating world, I am struck by the changes in the light, the way Wyn Evans’s tall, translucent columns of slender LED lights fire up and die down, glowing faintly then more strongly, casting the walls of the room in light which goes from tan to orange to a fierce whiteness. I check the skylights to see what the day is doing. Time passes and everything changes. I am enjoying being here.

Wyn Evans’ mobiles are named after David Tudor, the American pianist and composer who collaborated with Cage for decades. There are further allusions here, not least to Marcel Duchamp. The accidental cracks in the windcreens are a kind of parallel to the cracks in Duchamp’s 1923 *Large Glass*, damaged soon after it was first exhibited. Duchamp accepted the accident as part of the work, just as Cage accepted indeterminacy in his music. Wyn Evans is in many ways a successor to this lineage, and has made several works that directly quote Duchamp.

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📷 'Neon in daylight is a great pleasure' ... columns of slender LED lights, as part of)(at Mostyn, Wales. Photograph: Rob Battersby Photography/Rob Battersby

Elsewhere are more references and readings - from a visual poem by Scottish writer and artist Ian Hamilton Finlay to the choreography and [gestures of Japanese Noh theatre](#), from the thinking of French philosopher Gilles Deleuze to the compositions of Olivier Messiaen. And, undoubtedly, much else besides.

The experience of Wyn Evan's art, which is always about more than sight alone, can be giddy, transporting, full of visual pleasure - and sometimes carry a little danger, or at least the threat of it. It is difficult not to be confused by the real and the apparition, the neon hanging in space and its reflections in the glass. On an earlier visit to Mostyn, when the work was still being installed, I saw how the elements of the biggest neon work here, which runs the entire length of one gallery, were mapped out by a choreographic drawing on the gallery floor.

Mostyn Drift, originally conceived as an installation in Aspen, Colorado, which the artist never got to travel to see during the pandemic, has a stately feel, with long swooping arcs and shorter neon accents. From some angles it is an indecipherable neon scribble, a jumble; from others it resembles a hurried shorthand of hooks, loops, arcs and vectors. I think of a mad scientist's blackboard drawing that is constantly being revised and overwritten. One passage recalls geometric diagrams of chemical structures. Another neon arc tracks the path a loping ball might take in the air, another makes you think of particles in an accelerator. In the more tightly configured

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and more bounded Neon Forms (after Noh 1), the opening and closing of fans and the stamping of a foot can be found, translated into an abstraction of arcs and swoops, larger and smaller movements. I could, and did, get happily lost among the lights and reflections, losing and refinding myself as the daylight slowly shifted.

Mental flight, counterplays of colliding rhythms, enmeshings and interpenetrations, things passing through: as soon as you think you've got a handle on one thing, something else happens. It is as though the artist were holding several contradictory ideas in his head at the same time, and somehow managing to keep everything aloft – like Chinese circus plate-spinners, or a conjurer doing impossible things with an interlocking group of metal rings. One false move and it all ends up on the floor.

Other sounds intrude, the chatterings and blips and grating white noise of several animated structuralist films which Wyn Evans' partner, [film-maker Steve Farrer](#), made in the mid-1970s. These black and white films, projected in a space behind a curtain at the end of one gallery, provide a weirdly hypnotic and intimate counterpoint to Wyn Evans' work, with juddering bars of blackness crossing and recrossing the screen. Maybe inappropriately, my thoughts led to the kinds of films the bad guys use to brainwash their victims with in 1960s thrillers like *The Ipcress File*.

Upstairs at Mostyn, behind another curtain, Wyn Evans presents a short video shot on his iPhone. Bright sun falls on a garden wall, where an unspooled yellow metal tape-measure hangs in tangled loops. A garden hose plays across the metal, the water rendered by the phone's technology as a chugging globular arc that splinters as it hits the metal. The artist calls this a sort of impromptu visual haiku, and plans to add more short films as the show progresses. It is difficult not to try to untangle what it might mean. I thought of [poet William Carlos Williams and his Red Wheelbarrow 'glazed with rain water'](#), but it wasn't needed. We can take some pleasures as we find them.

...)(by Cerith Wyn Evans is at the Mostyn gallery until 4 February 2023.