



Venice Biennale: Cardiff mum joins art show daily from flat

By Huw Thomas

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"There is something happening in Cardiff and being experienced in Venice"

Artist Sean Edwards has opened an exhibition in Venice featuring a daily live performance by his mum.

Edwards is representing Wales at the prestigious Venice Biennale, the leading event showcasing contemporary art from around the world.

Mother Lilly performs a monologue from her council flat in Cardiff which is broadcast live into the exhibition.

Edwards's work draws on his working class upbringing on the city's Llanedeyrn estate.

He said his mother's voice was an antidote to the "privileged spaces" of the Biennale.

BBC News, May 2019

Tanya Leighton



JAMIE WOODLEY

| Sean Edwards's work has been inspired by his working class upbringing



NATIONAL THEATRE WALES

| Edwards's mother will be part of the exhibition every day until November

"It was very important that an actual voice was heard in the exhibition, a voice that isn't necessarily heard in these types of privileged spaces," said Edwards.

"My mum's voice is one that isn't used to public speaking, or public address, and by using her voice - both her vocal voice and her stories, her tales - I hope I can again begin to talk about some of these small details.

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"And there is the importance of connecting Wales and Venice. There is something happening in Cardiff and being experienced in Venice."

His upbringing has inspired the work, and the decision to include his mum - a single parent with no experience of performance or public speaking - allowed him to connect his personal version of Wales with the exhibition in Italy.

Edwards's mum Lilly reads a script which merges family history with fiction in a performance titled Refrain.



Edwards grew up on the Llanedeyrn estate on the outskirts of Cardiff in the 1980s



Edwards said it was a "great experience" to show work on the international stage

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The artist worked with National Theatre Wales to produce this element of the exhibition, which requires his mother to read the script from her home in Cardiff every afternoon until the Biennale closes in November.

The performance lasts around 25 minutes and is heard every afternoon at 2pm on speakers throughout the exhibition space in Venice.

Visitors to the Wales exhibition also encounter Edwards's physical art. An organised mass of wood, printed with fragments of images associated with his youth, fills the most ornate room of the former convent where the show is held.

A smaller room has a TV set playing a video showing dominoes being shuffled, evoking memories of his father playing the game. In another room a poster, printed on broadsheet newspaper, reads 'Free School Dinners' and recalls how the artist was one of the only boys at his Catholic school to have to queue up for a free meal.



Blankets on display as part of Undo Things Done, 2019, Sean Edwards

One of the largest rooms contains three blankets in block colours, stitched to include the letters of newspaper mastheads and inspired by the Welsh working class tradition of blanket-making.

The final room contains a large photograph of the artist's chewed fingernails, an inherited trope which connects visitors to the artist's roots.

Edwards said: "My attempt is to try and make work that reflects on a sense of autobiography. I have made a work previously that looked at a building called

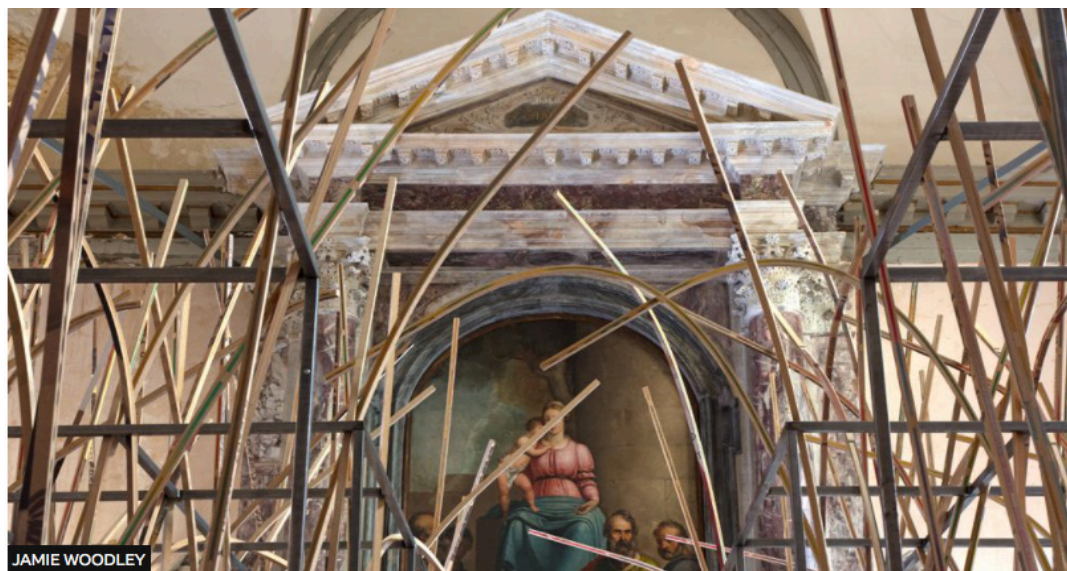
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the Maelfa shopping centre on the Llanedeyrn estate where I grew up.

"And really I wanted to develop a way of working with that, and to creating a body of work - sculptures, video, a live play piece - that attempted to look at what it meant to grow up working class, with something I'm calling a condition of 'not expecting much' and how really that can be translated into a body of sculptures."



| Edwards wanted to show "small details and small stories" reflecting his own personal history

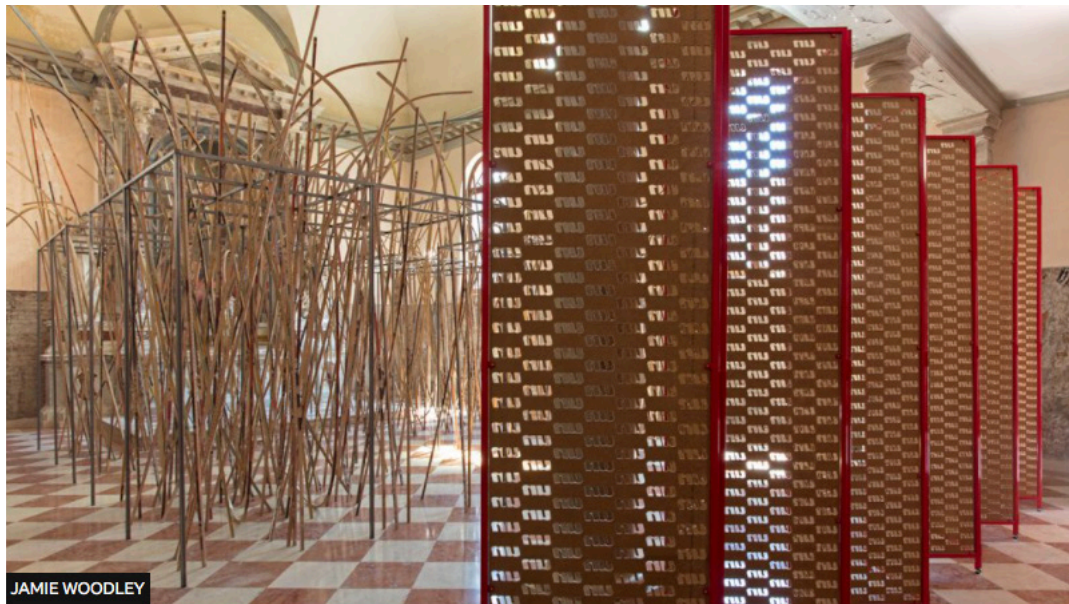


| The installation is in a church, also used as a school, in Venice

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Edwards said he grew up in a condition of 'not expecting much' and he wanted to express this in sculpture and images



He said the works were "open enough so people can weave their own stories into them"

Edwards was born in Cardiff in 1980 and graduated from Cardiff School of Art and Design, before studying an MA in sculpture at Slade School of Fine Art.

Wales has had a presence at the Venice Biennale since 2003, with artists selected to represent the best in Welsh contemporary art.

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Louise Wright, of Arts Council of Wales, who commissioned the work, said: "In November at the end of the exhibition there will be a broadcast event but also there will also be a substantial tour back in Wales and also with our partner The Bluecoat in Liverpool."

The exhibition was created in partnership with Wrexham arts hub Ty Pawb and the curator Marie-Anne McQuay.

Edwards's work will also be exhibited at Ty Pawb in 2020.

Undo Things Done by Sean Edwards *is at Santa Maria Ausiliatrice, Castello, Venice from 11 May-24 November 2019, Tues-Sunday, 1000-1800; Refrain is performed daily at 1400.*