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New talent: the rising stars of culture, science and food 2019

A film director bringing women's stories to the fore; a chef serving up vegan Afro-Caribbean classics... plus activism, art and jazz - we profile the hottest new talent for 2019

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Film: Harry Wootliff

Leeds-born writer and director Harry Wootliff's journey into film-making came via a stint as a performer: she trained as a dancer and actor before turning her attention to writing. Things clicked into place when she made her first short, *Nits*, a multi-award winning heart-tug of a film that earned a prestigious slot in Cannes.

"I remember standing on set, looking at the actress and thinking, this is perfect," she says. "I get to act through someone else. I don't have to be the focus. It was a revelation really." It's perhaps because of her experience as an actor that Wootliff brings such an acute emotional intelligence to her work with her stars.

We meet in London's Soho, around the corner from the post-production studio where Wootliff is editing two episodes of the ITV series *Deep Water*. Warm and funny, with a ready laugh, she says the idea behind her feature debut, *Only You* (due out in the

Art: Sean Edwards



'There are more opportunities in smaller cities': Cardiff artist Sean Edwards in his studio. Photograph: Antonio Olmos for the Observer

In a suburban garden in Cardiff, past discarded toys and a blue plastic slide, is the studio of the artist representing Wales at the 2019 Venice Biennale. A DIY wooden structure full of random objects and scrawled notes (“not expecting much”; “dissappointing [sic] rather than specatcular [sic]”), it suits Sean Edwards’s aesthetic.

A 38-year-old sculptor with a stunning CV (an MA from the Slade School of Fine Art, solo exhibitions behind him in London, Berlin and Bristol), Edwards is also a “very dyslexic” father of two, brought up by a single mother on a Cardiff council estate in the 1980s.

His work explores the sculptural possibilities of objects in ordinary people’s lives, often by using multimedia. His breakthrough 2010 solo show, *Maelfa*, was about the brutalist shopping centre he lived near as a child, incorporating a silent film, photographs, prints, models and ephemera. Another project, on Bruce Springsteen’s *Nebraska*, saw Edwards presenting his notebooks instead of anything grander, because this felt “more honest”.

“I like closing in on small details,” he says. “They often have the potential to tell us about bigger things on a wider scale.” Sculpture shouldn’t just be about “chipping away at huge things with a hammer, anyway”, he adds. “It should be about people experiencing objects in a space, and being drawn into them.”

Edwards’s Biennale project broaches new territory, however: it includes a theatre piece, which involves him working with National Theatre Wales. He won’t reveal more about his “poetic inquiry into place, politics and class, intertwined with personal histories” that will open in Venice in May, but his ongoing interest in the topic of disappointment has a place, and a memory of being put into a different line for free school meals mirrors some sketches on the studio wall. “I am a working artist because of university grants, Arts Council funding and money from the Welsh government,” he smiles.

Edwards also loves being an artist in Cardiff, having worked with the g39 artist-run space

in the city; he also teaches at the Cardiff School of Art and Design, where he was an undergraduate. “It’s really exciting here. I see this in Birmingham and Liverpool as well - there are more opportunities in smaller cities, and the costs aren’t astronomical. People forget that smaller places can be the most interesting, really.” It’s certainly a philosophy he lives by. **Jude Rogers**