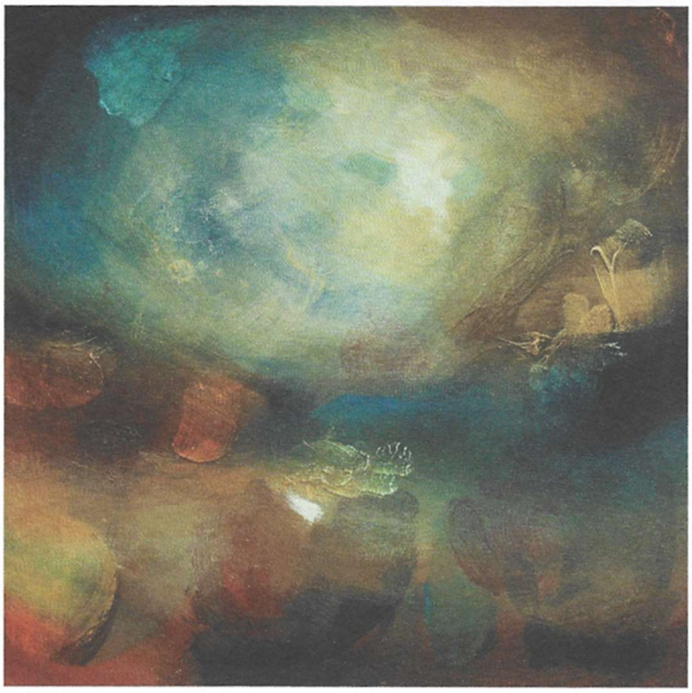
| GREFFTWR LLŶN |
| LLŶN ARTISAN |

THERESE URBANSKA, ARTIST

'YOU CAN TAKE THE GIRL OUT OF LLŶN...'

- WORDS BY GEIRIAU GAN DEBS WILLIAMS -



When it comes to local artists, you don't get much more 'Llŷn' than Therese Urbanska. Raised in Rhydyclafdy, Therese - or Tess, as she introduces herself - lives and breathes the Llŷn Peninsula. Her paintings are all in some way inspired by Llŷn, and our interview takes place at her exhibition at Oriel Plas Glyn y Weddw, one of the Peninsula's best-loved attractions.

We start by taking a tour of Tess' exhibition, and this in itself is a rare treat; having an artist you admire acting as your guide around her exhibition is not something that happens to the average art fan very often.

For those yet to discover Tess' work, here's a brief overview. She works in acrylic on board, using texture and colour to create images very obviously inspired by the landscape around her. Traditionally,

Pan ddaw hi i arlunwyr lleol, prin y cewch chi unrhyw un sy'n fwy o ferch Pen Llŷn na Therese Urbanska. Wedi ei magu yn Rhydyclafdy, mae Therese – neu Tess, fel y mae hi'n cyflwyno ei hun – wedi uniaethu'n llwyr â'r lle. Mae ei darluniau un ac oll wedi eu hysbrydoli mewn rhyw fodd gan Lŷn, ac mae'n cyfweliad yn cael ei gynnal mewn arddangosfa o'i gwaith ym Mhlas Glyn y Weddw, un o hoff atyniadau'r penrhyn.

Dechreuwn efo tro drwy arddangosfa Tess, ac mae hyn yn ei hun yn dipyn o fraint; dydy cael arlunydd yr ydych yn rhyfeddu at ei dawn yn eich tywys drwy ei harddangosfa ddim yn rhywbeth sy'n digwydd yn aml iawn i'r edmygwr celf cyffredin.

I'r rhai ohonoch sydd eto i gael eich swyno gan waith Tess, dyma drosolwg byr. Mae hi'n gweithio mewn acrylig ar fwrdd, gan ddefnyddio gwead a lliw i

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Above left and opposite page: Tess' painting has recently become more abstract with a focus on light.
Above right: Tess at Oriel Plas with a painting which features one of her trademark white cottages.

Tess has painted little cottages into every scene, and this is perhaps what she's best known for. But more recently her inspiration has taken her in new directions: foliage and light - the latter expressing itself in abstract pieces which sometimes involve unorthodox production methods.

Although I love each and every one of Tess' paintings, as we tour her exhibition there's one that keeps drawing me back. It's an abstract, which at first glance might be written off by some as merely 'paint on a board'. But look properly and there's this incredible light, the moon shining lazily above a just-discernible rural landscape, bathing it in a dreamy glow from which it's difficult to draw one's eyes away.

Tess laughs. "Actually, I have a confession to make about this painting," she says. "I was painting something else, and this was the board I was using as a palette while I mixed my colours. After I'd finished painting, I looked at this palette and loved how it looked, so I added some finishing touches and here it is!"

As we walk around the exhibition – conveniently situated in Plas' foyer, so it's the first thing visitors see on arrival – Tess is delighted to

greu delweddau sy'n hollol amlwg wedi eu hysbrydoli gan y dirwedd o'i hamgylch. Yn draddodiadol, mae Tess wedi peintio bythynnod bychain ym mhob golygfa, ac mae'n debyg mai dyma'r hyn y mae hi enwocaf amdano. Ond yn fwy diweddar mae ei hysbrydoliaeth wedi ei thywys i gyfeiriadau gwahanol; dail a goleuni – a'r goleuni yn mynegi ei hun mewn darnau haniaethol sydd ar brydiau yn galw am ddulliau cynhyrchu anarferol.

Er fy mod wedi gwirioni â phob un o baentiadau Tess yn ddi-feth, mae un yn arbennig sy'n mynnu tynnu fy sylw. Gwaith haniaethol ydy o, a allai ar gipolwg gael ei ddiystyru gan rai fel rhyw 'baent ar fwrdd'. Ond craffwch yn iawn ac mi welwch y goleuni anghredadwy 'ma, y lleuad yn disgleirio'n ddiog uwchben tirwedd wledig prin y mae modd ei adnabod, yn gorwedd mewn rhyw wawl breuddwydiol y mae'n anodd tynnu eich llygaid oddi wrtho.

Mae Tess yn chwerthin. "A dweud y gwir, mae gen i gyfaddefiad i'w wneud am y llun yma," meddai. "Ro'n i'n peintio rhywbeth arall, a hwn oedd y bwrdd ro'n i'n ei ddefnyddio fel palet wrth gymysgu fy lliwiau. Ar ôl i mi orffen peintio, edrychais ar y palet a mopio ar sut oedd yn edrych, felly mi ychwanegais ryw gyffyrddiadau terfynol a dyma fo!"

see a red sticker underneath another painting. Making a living as an artist is not easy, she says, so those red stickers indicating a sale mean a lot.

The tour over, we grab a coffee and go to sit outside in the dying rays of the Easter sun, overlooking the sea whose colours and textures inspire Tess so deeply. She's an easy person to be around; our hour together is a laugh-a-minute experience, more akin to meeting up with your best mate for a glass of Prosecco than interviewing an artist at what is, after all, a pretty posh gallery.

Tess tells me about her family background. Her Polish grandfather moved to England after the Second World War ("like so many did," she says), and while living in London he met and married her grandmother. They had a son who went to college in Manchester and there he met Tess' mother when they were just 17 years old – "and they're still together today," Tess beams.

Tess' mother had holidayed in Nefyn as a child, and when she and her husband were in their twenties they decided to move away from London to "escape the rat race". They settled in Rhydyclafdy and that's where Tess, her husband, and their 6 and 9 year old daughters live today – although, Tess is quick to point out, not with her parents.

"I had no Welsh until the age of four," Tess says, "but then I went to primary school and within six months I was fluent."

She went to Manchester to do her art degree, but couldn't settle, "so I wasted my parents' money for two years, basically! I flunked it, and swore never to pick up a brush again. But then one day my parents gave me a prospectus for Coleg Menai, and luckily I was able to pick up

Wrth i ni grwydro o amgylch yr arddangosfa – sy'n gyfleus iawn wedi ei lleoli yng nghyntedd y Plas, fel mai dyna'r peth cyntaf y mae ymwelwyr yn ei weld wrth gyrraedd – mae Tess wrth ei bodd o weld sticer goch o dan lun arall. Dydy ennill bywoliaeth fel arlunydd ddim yn hawdd, meddai, felly mae'r sticeri coch sy'n arwydd bod un arall wedi ei werthu yn golygu llawer iddi.

Efo'n tro drosodd, bachwn goffi'r un a mynd i eistedd y tu allan ym mhelydrau olaf haul y Pasg, yn edrych allan dros y môr y mae ei liwiau a'i wead yn ysbrydoli Tess cymaint. Mae hi'n berson hawdd i fod yn ei chwmni; mae ein hawr efo'n gilydd yn brofiad llawn hwyl, mwy fel cyfarfod eich ffrind gorau am wydriad o Prosecco na chyfweld arlunydd mewn beth sydd, wedi'r cyfan, yn oriel digon crand.

Mae Tess yn adrodd peth o gefndir ei theulu. Pwyliad oedd ei thaid a symudodd i Loegr ar ôl yr Ail Ryfel Byd ("fel y gwnaeth llawer ohonyn nhw," meddai), a thra'n byw yn Llundain cwrddodd a phriododd â'i nain. Mi gafon nhw fab a aeth i'r coleg ym Manceinion, gan gyfarfod â mam Tess yno pan oedd y ddau yn ddim ond 17 oed – "ac maen nhw'n dal efo'i gilydd heddiw," gwena Tess.

Roedd mam Tess wedi bod ar ei gwyliau yn Nefyn pan oedd hi'n blentyn, ac â hithau a'i gŵr yn eu hugeiniau mi benderfynon nhw adael Llundain er mwyn dianc "o'r ras lygod". Ymgartrefon nhw yn Rhydyclafdy a dyna le mae Tess, ei gŵr, a'u merched 6 a 9 oed yn byw heddiw – er nid, fel mae Tess yn prysuro i egluro, efo'i rhieni.

"Doedd gen i'r un gair o Gymraeg tan o'n i'n bedair oed," meddai Tess, "ond yna mi ddechreuais i yn yr ysgol gynradd ac o fewn chwech mis ro'n i'n rhugl."

Aeth i Fanceinion i ddilyn cwrs gradd mewn celfyddyd, ond methodd yn lân ag ymgartrefu yno, "felly mi wastraffais bres fy rhieni am ddwy flynedd, a bod yn blaen. Gwnes lanast o'r peth, ac mi dyngais i na faswn i byth yn gafael mewn brwsh wedyn. Ond un diwrnod

my degree again from the second year."

It was while Tess was at college that she met her husband, a painter and decorator who also paints murals. "He paints huge walls," she says. "He struggled for a while with canvasses, but he's much happier doing walls."

Did Tess always want to be an artist?

"Oh yes," she says. "As a kid I loved making the things they showed on Blue Peter. I didn't like any of the other segments of the programme – only the art and craft segments – and I was always drawing horses. I was obsessed!"

Is she from an artistic family?

"Actually, yes. My mother and my maternal grandmother are both talented textile artists – you know, makers – so my parents have always been really supportive. I always knew I wanted to do this full time. And my eldest daughter – I can really see a lot of myself in her. The minute she comes home from school, the first thing she does is crafting."

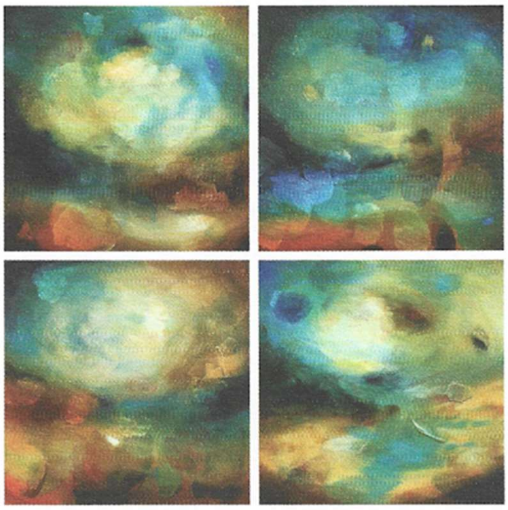
Having young children and working with them on artistic pursuits must be helpful in supporting Tess' other role, as an art workshop leader at Plas Glyn y Weddw. The Criw Celf project enables children aged 11-13 to work with professional artists, one Saturday a month. Tess started as an assisting artist, but then Criw Celf Bach – for children aged 7-11 years – was created, so she now takes two of those workshops too.

"It's more than just an art club," Tess explains. "We push the kids to experiment and try out new things, new media, and try everything from still life to animation and felting."

And what about adults?

"On Thursdays, in batches of 10 weeks at a time, I run workshops for Ynys Môn and Gwynedd MIND at Glynllifon," she says. "It's open to all, but the main purpose is to promote mental wellbeing through the arts. It's one of my favourite classes; they're such lovely people who create such a warm, friendly atmosphere. If anyone feels nervous or anxious these ladies make them feel at ease. There's so much laughter!"

Laughter having largely been present throughout our time together, it's a touching moment when, as we're wrapping up, Tess becomes serious for a moment. "I love Llŷn because this is where I'm from," she says, earnestly. "I can't get



Above and opposite: Although some pieces are more abstract than others Tess' work is all inspired by Llŷn; her most recent collection uses the same tones throughout with a varying focus on light.

rhoddodd fy rhieni brosbectws i mi ar gyfer Coleg Menai, ac yn ffodus bu'n bosib i mi ail-afael yn fy ngradd o'r ail flwyddyn."

Cyfarfyddodd â'i gŵr tra yn y coleg, peintiwr ac addurnwr wrth ei waith sydd hefyd yn peintio murluniau. "Mae'n peintio waliau anferthol," meddai. "Ymdrechodd am gyfnod efo cynfasau, ond mae'n llawer hapusach yn gwneud waliau."

Oedd Tess wastad am fod yn arlunydd?

"O oeddwn," meddai. "Fel plentyn ro'n i wrth fy modd yn creu'r pethau roedden nhw'n eu dangos ar Blue Peter. Do'n i ddim yn hoff o unrhyw un o'r rhannau eraill o'r rhaglen – dim ond y rhannau celf a chrefft – ac ro'n i drwy'r amser yn darlunio ceffylau. Ro'n i wedi gwirioni arnyn nhw!"

Ydy hi o deulu artistig?

"Ydw, a dweud y gwir. Mae fy mam a nain ar ochr fy mam ill dwy yn artistiaid tecstil dawnus – gwneuthurwyr, w'ch chi – felly mae fy rhieni wedi bod yn hynod gefnogol erioed. Ro'n i'n gwybod erioed 'mod isio gwneud hyn yn llawn amser. A fy merch hynaf – dwi'n gweld llawer ohonof i fy hun ynddi hi. Yr eiliad y daw hi adra o'r ysgol, y peth cyntaf mae hi'n ei wneud ydy crefftio."

Mae'n rhaid bod y ffaith iddi fod â phlant ifanc, ac iddi weithio efo nhw ar ddiddordebau celfyddydol, o gymorth i Tess yn ei rôl arall fel arweinydd gweithdy celf ym Mhlas Glyn y Weddw. Mae'r prosiect Criw Celf yn galluogi plant 11–13 oed i weithio efo artistiaid proffesiynol ar un ddydd Sadwrn y mis. Dechreuodd Tess fel artist cynorthwyol, ond yna crëwyd Criw Celf Bach – ar gyfer plant 7–11 oed – felly mae hi bellach yn gyfrifol am ddau o'r gweithdai rheiny hefyd.

"Mae'n fwy na dim ond clwb celf," eglura Tess. "Rydan ni'n gwthio'r plant i arbrofi a rhoi cynnig ar bethau newydd, cyfryngau newydd, ac i droi eu llaw at bopeth o fywyd llonydd i animeiddio a ffeltio."

A beth am oedolion?

"Ar ddyddiau Iau, mewn sypiau o 10 wythnos ar y tro, mi fydda' i'n rhedeg gweithdai ar gyfer MIND Ynys Môn a Gwynedd yng Nglynllifon," meddai. "Maen nhw'n agored i bawb, ond y prif bwrpas ydy hyrwyddo lles meddyliol drwy'r celfyddydau. Mae'n un o fy hoff ddosbarthiadau; maen nhw'n bobol mor hyfryd sy'n creu awyrgylch gynnes a chyfeillgar. Os bydd unrhyw un yn teimlo'n nerfus neu'n ansicr bydd y merched hyn yn datrys hynny iddyn nhw. Mae 'na gymaint o chwerthin!"

Above: Recently Tess' inspiration has taken her in a new direction; exploring foliage and light.

> I CAN'T GET ENOUGH OF WHERE WE LIVE. I FEEL SO LUCKY TO LIVE, WORK AND RAISE MY CHILDREN HERE. MY WORK IS ALL INSPIRED BY LLŶN

enough of where we live. I feel so lucky to live, work and raise my children here. My work is all inspired by Llŷn; there will always be a little bit of Pen Llŷn in there."

You can take the girl out of Llŷn, I joke, but you can't take Llŷn out of the girl. "Exactly!" Tess laughs, that fleeting moment of seriousness giving way to her default condition of laughter, light and joyfulness. "Exactly!"

You can buy Tess' original paintings online at www.teska.co.uk and www.facebook.com/teska.art, and buy her prints at Cwt Tatws, Tonnau in Pwllheli and Glosters and the Rob Piercy Gallery in Porthmadog. ●

www.teska.co.uk
www.facebook.com/teska.art

Bu cymaint o chwerthin yn ystod ein hamser yng nghwmni'n gilydd, ond daeth rhyw deimlad i'n sgwrs wrth iddi dynnu at ei therfyn pan drodd Tess yn ddifrifol am ennyd. "Dwi'n caru Llŷn oherwydd mai o fam'ma dwi'n dod," meddai o ddifrif. "Alla' i ddim cael digon o le dwi'n byw. Dwi'n teimlo mor ffodus i fyw, gweithio a magu fy mhlant yma. Mae fy ngwaith i gyd yn cael ei ysbrydoli gan Lŷn; mi fydd 'na wastad dipyn bach o Ben Llŷn ynddo."

Mi allwch chi lusgo'r hogan allan o Lŷn, dwi'n cellwair, ond allwch chi ddim llusgo Llŷn allan o'r hogan. "Yn hollol!" chwertha Tess, yr ennyd bach hwnnw o ddifrifoldeb yn ildio'n ôl i'w chyflwr naturiol o chwerthin, goleuni a llawenydd. "Yn hollol!"

Gallwch brynu lluniau gwreiddiol Tess arlein yn www.teska.co.uk neu www.facebook.com/teska.art, a gellir prynu ei phrintiadau yn Cwt Tatws, Tonnau ym Mhwllheli, ac yn Glosters neu Oriel Rob Piercy ym Mhorthmadog. ●

We Love Creativity | We Love Fine Art | We Love Painting | Caru Talent Lleol | We Love Tess Urbanska