

# MILQUETOAST

## Bedwyr Williams

24th July - 11th September 2021  
Monday - Saturday | 10:00-16:00

This major new exhibition by Welsh artist Bedwyr Williams interrogates and satirises the role of cultural establishments within contemporary society.

Via sculpture, video, painting and drawing, Williams parodies the often fetishistic architectural motifs and bureaucratic hierarchies appropriated within the culture sector and the city.

The lead image created by Williams for this exhibition is of a hybrid, pale, freckled protagonist, who is half building, half bigwig: Milquetoast<sup>1</sup> (meaning bland, inoffensive and unassertive). This recurring architectural character is present throughout the exhibition, represented in multiple forms. Milquetoast responds to the boom and inevitable fatigue of progressive cultural architecture, and the rise of the 'Uber Curator'<sup>2</sup> across Europe during the 1990s when Williams began his career as an artist.

A series of imagined concrete buildings queue up along the black wall of the gallery. This serene boulevard of buildings bathed in moonlight, appear humorous and absurd with anthropomorphic details. These buildings respond to architectural and art world tropes of the 1990s.

Opposite the black wall, we are welcomed into an imagined landscape populated by apparitions, recollections and imagined scenarios. Monolithic institutions are cast adrift in haunting, dreamlike panoramas.

Williams' paintings explore curatorial spectres, gestures and affectations, and objects he associates with the 'art world' and its players. They include fashions and tools of the modern-day curator or cultural worker, from Le Corbusier style spectacles to a neat square of Ritter Sport chocolate.

In the vitrines we meet a cast of fictional stereotypes and satirical scenarios drawn from Williams' experiences of living and working in Wales and London over the last two decades. Drawn compulsively on a daily basis (always in the same size sketchbook), the drawings diarise and reflect life in contemporary society – its politics and its cultures, both on and offline.

An installation of Williams' notorious digital iPad drawings sees them magnified, emphasising the brightness of a tablet screen and accompanied by a seething, menacing soundtrack.

In *The Militia* (2021) we are transported into a familiar urban environment, the 'Culture Quarter'; a site at the core of city place-making and urban regeneration. Williams' deadpan voice-over describes the surrounding city's occupation by protesters. A splinter group of these protesters has occupied the city's art gallery next door to the Maritime Museum. The militia enter via the gift shop, and we observe their ghostly presence through the eyes of the gallery staff, as they watch the devastation unfold via the building's CCTV.

Donation boxes are overturned, phallic ceramic knick-knacks are smashed and children's activity packs are hurled along concrete corridors. As the occupation continues, the group's behaviour is gradually influenced by the architecture of the building and its civic functions.

The institution itself asserts its agency, influencing the behaviour and actions of those within, reminding us of the power buildings can have in shaping our life experiences and knowledge.

“... you're not supposed to make work about being an artist but I can't help it. I still find it such an odd environment. The hyperbole, the raptures, the backtracking, the misfires. The way artists talk to and about each other both online and offline. It's all odd, and nothing in my childhood prepared me for being around people like this in buildings like this”  
Bedwyr Williams, 2021.

<sup>1</sup> Caspar Milquetoast was a character in American comic strip *The Timid Soul* depicting the life of a feeble, timid man, created by cartoonist H. T. Webster. The character's name is itself derived from milk toast, a bland food that one could imagine being suitable for weak character. Caspar Milquetoast eventually became a household name in American and the wider English speaking world, with his surname subsequently entering popular vocabulary to describe a person of a similar character.

<sup>2</sup> The 'Uber Curator' refers to curators and other art world figures in positions of power who came to prominence in the 1990s. Following the publication of 'New Museology' (Verda, 1989), shifts in curatorial practice led to a split where some rose to assume ultimate control and authorship over an exhibition. Examples include Hans Ulrich-Obrist, who is preceded by the likes of Pontus Hulten, Seth Sieglaub and Harald Szeeman. Others moved to consider more who visits cultural institutions and how their experiences are formed.

MILQUETOAST is a Southwark Park Galleries touring exhibition in partnership with Tŷ Pawb and Aberystwyth Arts Centre.



# MILQUETOAST

Bedwyr Williams

24 Gorffennaf - 11 Medi 2021  
Dydd Llun - Dydd Sadwrn | 10:00-16:00

Mae'r brif arddangosfa newydd hwn gan yr artist Cymraeg Bedwyr Williams yn cwestiynu ac yn dychan rôl sefydliadau diwylliannol o fewn cymdeithas gyfoes.

Trwy gerflunwaith, fideo, paentio a darlunio, mae Williams yn gwawdio motiffau pensaernïol ffetisaidd a hierarchaethau biwrocraataidd sy'n adfeddu o fewn y sector diwylliant a'r ddinas.

Mae'r brif ddelwedd a grëwyd gan Williams ar gyfer yr arddangosfa o gymeriad hybrid, gwelw, brychlyd, sy'n hanner adeilad hanner crachach: Milquetoast<sup>1</sup> (sy'n golygu digyffro, diniwed a gwylaidd). Mae'r cymeriad pensaernïol hwn yn bresennol trwy gydol yr arddangosfa, wedi'i gynrychioli mewn nifer o ffurfiau. Mae Milquetoast yn ymateb i'r ffyniant a lludded anochel pensaernïaeth diwylliannol blaengar, a thwf y 'Curadur Trefol'<sup>2</sup> ar draws Ewrop yn ystod y 1990au pan ddechreuodd Williams ei yrfa fel artist.

Mae cyfres o adeiladau congrid dychmygus ar hyd wal ddu'r oriel. Mae'r rhodfa tawel o adeiladau yn ymdrochi yng ngolau'r lleuad, yn ymddangos yn ddigrif ac yn afresymol gyda manylion anthropomorffig. Mae'r adeiladau hyn yn ymateb i drosiadau'r byd pensaernïol a chelf y 1990au.

Gyferbyn â'r wal ddu, cawn ein croesawu i mewn i dirlun dychmygus wedi'i boblogi gan ddrychiolaethau, atgofion a sefyllfaoedd dychmygus. Caiff sefydliadau monolithig eu hymddatod mewn panoramas diollwng a breuddwydiol.

Mae paentiadau Williams yn archwilio symudiadau, ymagweddiadau a drychiolaethau curadurol, a gwrthrychau maen ei gysylltu â'r 'byd celf' a'i chwaraewyr. Maent yn cynnwys ffasiynau ac offer y curadur modern neu weithiwr diwylliannol, o ysblander Le Corbusier i sgwariau taclus siocled Ritter Sport.

Yn y cypyrddau gwydr rydym yn cwrdd â chast o ystrydebau ffuglennol a sefyllfaoedd dychanol o brofiadau Williams o fyw a gweithio yng Nghymru a Llundain dros y ddau ddegawd diwethaf. Wedi'u llunio'n gymhellol yn ddyddiol (bob amser mewn llyfr braslunio o'r un maint), mae'r lluniau yn llunio dyddiadur ac yn adlewyrchu bywyd mewn cymdeithas gyfoes - ei wleidyddiaeth a'i ddiwylliannau, ar-lein ac oddi ar-lein.

Mae gosodiad o luniadau iPad Williams yn cael eu cyflwyno yma am y tro cyntaf mewn sefydliad cyhoeddus. Yma mae'r lluniau digidol yn cael eu chwyddo, gan bwysleisio ar ddisgleirdeb y sgrin gyda cherddoriaeth cynhyrfus a bygythiol i gyd-fynd.

Yn The Militia (2021) cawn ein cludo i amgylchedd trefol cyfarwydd, yr 'Ardal Ddiwylliant'; safle sydd wrth wraidd adfywio trefol a chreu lle dinesig. Mae llais difynegiant Williams yn disgrifio meddiannaeth y ddinas amgylchynol gan brotestwyr. Mae grŵp bychan o'r protestwyr hyn wedi meddiannu oriel gelf y ddinas drws nesaf i'r Amgueddfa Forol. Maent yn

mynd i mewn trwy'r siop anrhegion, ac fe arsylwn eu presenoldeb arswydus trwy lygaid staff yr oriel, wrth iddynt wyllo'r distryw trwy deledu cylch caeedig yr adeilad.

Caiiff bocsys rhodd eu dymchwel, geriach seramig eu torri a phecynnau gweithgareddau plant eu taflu ar hyd y cynteddau congrid. Wrth i'r meddiannaeth barhau, mae ymddygiad y grŵp yn cael ei ddylanwadu'r raddol gan bensaerniaeth yr adeilad a'i swyddogaethau dinesig. Mae'r sefydliad ei hun yn mynnu ei asiantaeth, gan ddylanwadu ar ymddygiad a gweithredoedd y rhai ynddo, gan ein hatgoffa sut all bŵer yr adeiladau siapio ein gwybodaeth a phrofiadau bywyd.

“... nid ydych i fod i wneud gwaith amdan fod yn arlunydd ond ni allaf ei helpu. Rwy'n dal i ffeindio hi'n amgylchedd mor od. Yr ormodiaith, y perlewygon, y gwrthgilio, y camdanio. Y ffordd y mae artistiaid yn siarad â'i gilydd ac amdan ei gilydd ar-lein ac oddi ar-lein. Mae'r cyfan yn rhyfedd, a dim byd yn fy mhлentyndod a'm paratôdd ar gyfer bod o amgylch pobl fel hyn mewn adeiladau fel hyn.”

Bedwyr Williams, 2021.

<sup>1</sup> Roedd Caspar Milquetoast yn gymeriad mewn comig Americanaidd The Timid Soul sy'n portreadu bywyd dyn eiddil, llywaeth, a grëwyd gan y cartwnydd H. T. Webster. Mae enw'r cymeriad ei hun yn dod o dost llaeth, bwyd diflas sy'n addas ar gyfer cymeriad gwan. Daeth Caspar Milquetoast yn enw poblogaidd yn America a'r byd Saesneg, a daeth ei gyfenw yn eirfa poblogaidd i ddisgrifio person neu gymeriad tebyg.

<sup>2</sup> Mae'r 'Curadur Trefol' yn cyfeirio at guraduron a ffigyrau'r byd celf mewn safleoedd o bŵer a ddaeth i'r amlwg yn y 1990au. Yn dilyn cyhoeddi 'New Museology (Verda, 1989), arweiniodd newid mewn arferion curadurol at raniad lle cododd rhai i feddiannu rheolaeth ac awdurdod dros arddangosfa. Mae esiamplau yn cynnwys Hans Ulrich-Obrist, a ddilynwyd gan Pontus Hulten, Seth Sieglaub a Harald Szeeman. Symudodd eraill i ystyried y rhai sy'n ymweld â sefydliadau diwylliannol a sut ffurfir eu profiadau.

Arddangosfa deithiol Southwark Park Galleries yw MILQUETOAST mewn partneriaeth â Tŷ Pawb a Chanolfan y Celfyddydau Aberystwyth.



PAUL & LOUISE COOKE  
ENDOWMENT



Supported using public funding by  
ARTS COUNCIL  
ENGLAND



# MILQUETOAST

## Bedwyr Williams

### Rhestr o Waith Celf:

#### Waliau:

*MILQUETOAST*, Paentiadau, Di-deitl, 2020-21, olew ar gynfas, dimensiynau amrywiol  
*MILQUETOAST*, delwedd ddigidol, finyl wal, cynhyrchwyd gan Llyr Williams

#### Cypyrddau Gwydr:

*Lluniadau Di-deitl*, 2019-21, beiro ac inc ar bapur, 15x15cm

#### Taflun:

*Darlun iPad*, 2019-21, gosodiad fideo a sain, 0:17:29

#### Ffilm:

*The Militia*, 2021, gan Bedwyr Williams, Fideo HD, lliw a sain, 0:13:00  
Animeiddiad – Steve Kirby; Cerddoriaeth – Llyr Williams; Sgript ac Adroddiad – Bedwyr Williams  
Cafodd cysyniad a sgript fideo *The Militia* ei ddatblygu fel stori fer a gomisiynwyd gan Theatrum Mundi ar gyfer Concrete and Ink: Storytelling and the Future of Architecture, cyhoeddwyd gan nai010 yn 2021

#### Adeiladau:

Jesmonite, Lamp LED Viessmann, MDF Valchromat, paent chwistrell, a gynhyrchwyd gyda chymorth Paul Eastwood

### List of Art Works:

#### On the Walls:

*MILQUETOAST*, Paintings, Untitled, 2020-21, oil on canvas, dimensions variable  
*MILQUETOAST*, Digital image, wall vinyl, produced by Llyr Williams

#### In the Vitrines:

*Untitled Drawings*, 2019-21, pen and ink on paper, 15x15cm

#### Projection:

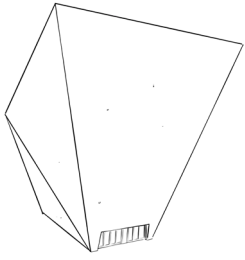
*iPad Drawings*, 2019-21, Video and sound installation, 0:17:29

#### Film:

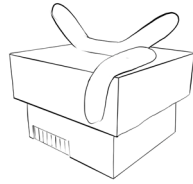
*The Militia*, 2021, by Bedwyr Williams, HD Video, colour, sound, 0:13:00  
Animation – Steve Kirby; Music – Llyr Williams; Script and Narration – Bedwyr Williams  
*The Militia* video script and concept was developed as a short story commissioned by Theatrum Mundi for *Concrete and Ink: Storytelling and the Future of Architecture*, published by nai010 in 2021

#### Buildings:

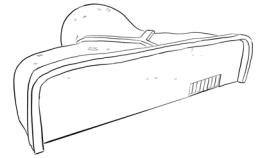
Jesmonite, Viessmann LED Lamp, Valchromat MDF, spray paint, produced with assistance by Paul Eastwood



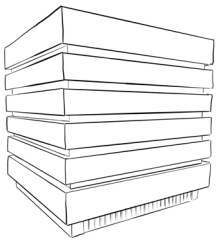
*Maltose Quit Institute*



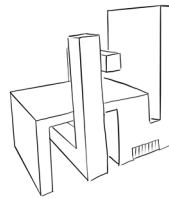
*Stomal Quite Project Space*



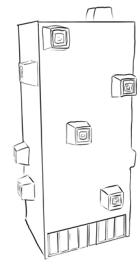
*Quasi Mottle Gallery*



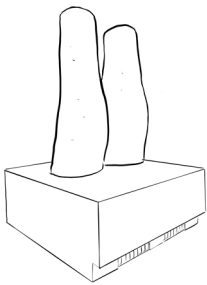
*Squat Motile Centre*



*Milquetoast*



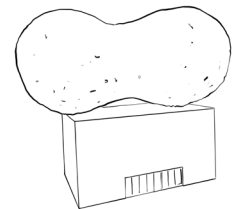
*The Metals Quoit Collection*



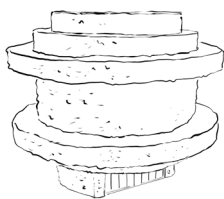
*Loquats Time Institute*



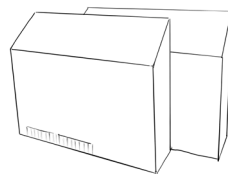
*Squeal Motti Foundation*



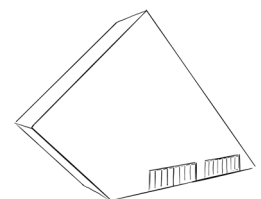
*Qua Motliest Foundation*



*Matec Quilts Foundation*



*Lea Quits Tom Gallery*



*Quails Totem*