

HANDEL EVANS

1932-1999

**The Handel Evans Collection, Archive and Trust
Fund at the School of Art Gallery and Museum,
Aberystwyth University**



The wealth and diversity of the visual arts in Wales in the 20th century is nowhere more evident in the School of Art Collection than in the “Artist Collections” it has acquired since the 1980s. As American institutions have demonstrated, such representative collections of works considered significant to artists’ careers, offer great potential for teaching and research. With the generous co-operation of the artist and/or their families, archive material, press cuttings, diaries and photographs have in many cases also been made available. As a Registered Museum, the endorsement and support of the Victoria and Albert Museum/Resource Purchase Fund and the National Art Collections Fund has been invaluable and effectively quadrupled the School’s purchasing power. The Museum now offers primary research material for staff, student and public reference and a regular programme of public exhibitions, some of which tour nationally. Within the University the Collection is actively used in training students who go on to become artists, art historians and museum curators.

In the Spring 2001 I was invited by the National Welsh-American Foundation to visit Philadelphia to talk on the work of Handel Evans and stage a small exhibition showcasing the work of the School of Art. Evans had died suddenly two years earlier, aged 66, and the Foundation wished to posthumously honour him with its first Contemporary Culture Award. Evans’ work was already well known to us here in the School of Art. Professor Alistair Crawford had met Handel at the British School at Rome and in 1990 purchased for the School of Art five drawings and tempera paintings covering the period 1951-1987; all were chosen from a book on his work published in Germany in 1989. Evans then donated *The Resurrection* (1960), a proposed mural for a Welsh chapel, and further works were given by the American collector Alan Soons and by the Arts Council of Wales.

Born in Pontypridd in 1932, and trained at Cardiff College of Art 1949-54, Handel Cromwell Evans subsequently made a living as a painter, draughtsman and printmaker over four decades in the Caribbean, America and Germany—where his reputation is greatest. He spent time at the British School at Rome and also studied etching at Atelier 17 in Paris. Evans was a truly International artist; his work is represented in collections across Europe and the Americas and in major institutions from the National Gallery of Jamaica to the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford. The NWAFA Award was received by the artist’s mother, Marian Evans-Quinn, who had flown to Philadelphia for the ceremony. It was there during our busy schedule of visits and official engagements in and around the city that we met for the first time. We shared much in common, not least our upbringing in the south Wales valleys, and upon our return I was invited to Ramsgate, Kent to see the studio. Handel had been her only child and as sole beneficiary of his estate Mrs Evans-Quinn was concerned to assure the long-term well being of the art works and archive material now in her possession.

As a result of this and subsequent visits, *The Handel Evans Collection, Archive and Trust Fund* has been established at UW Aberystwyth. The paintings and drawings comprising the Collection, close to a thousand items, together with the Archive (correspondence, sketch books, diaries,

photographs, etc.), are now housed and administered by the School of Art Gallery and Museum. Under the terms of the agreement, Mrs Evans-Quinn retains ownership of the works after which the title will pass to UWA. The Collection and Archive is already being used for educational and research purposes and selected items have been shown at Aberystwyth and Gregynog and more exhibitions are planned for 2005.

In addition, the Handel Evans Trust Fund is being set up with monies raised from the artist's estate and it will be invested with the intention of maximising the long-term future of the capital. (The School of Art Collections Committee already administers three designated endowment funds to run the Museum within the agreed policies: the Museum Endowment of Gwendoline and Margaret Davies of Gregynog, Catherine Lewis and the Blaenllwynant Trust Funds now amount to some £1.48 million.) Interest accrued from the Handel Evans Trust Fund will be used to care for and promote the Collection, provide research grants for the practice of art and art history, assist in the production of art publications, and to acquire works of art and archive material for teaching and research. Preference will be given to grant applications that involve the study of Handel Evans and use of the Collection and Archive or reflect aspects of the interests of Handel Evans, in particular music, travel abroad, and languages.

This remarkable Collection spans five decades in the career of Handel Evans who was a most gifted draughtsman and painter. Music was an important factor in his paintings, so too was his long-standing involvement with the theme of man and technology. The Collection extends from early, exquisitely executed portraits of family and friends, and urban scenes in Cardiff and Pontypridd, to figurative paintings made in the Bahamas and the more abstract works that attest to his strong affinity with Futurism, Surrealism and Cubism. During my visit to Pennsylvania I was fortunate to have met with Eugene Garfield, Founder and Chairman Emeritus of the Institute for Scientific Information in Philadelphia. Professor Garfield was a close friend and patron of the artist and in 1978 he commissioned a large mural painting. *Interpenetrations* bridges the gap between art and science and, as the artist writes, 'is a visual metaphor of the relationship between mind and information'. The figures symbolise the mind through its five senses; the complex structures that surround them represent the information environment. Evans was fascinated by the interdependency of the human race and information technology. Soon after the School established the Collection and Archive, Eugene Garfield generously donated the painting to hang in the Hugh Owen Library—the painting, which measures 4 by 12 foot, was crated, shipped and insured entirely at his expense.

Earlier this month, Mrs Evans-Quinn presented to the School one of her son's two grand pianos. Handel was an exceptional pianist and his splendidly refurbished seven-foot J & P Schiedmayer was manufactured in Stuttgart around 1912; supposedly the instrument had once belonged 'to a member of Hitler's circle'. In the School it will be displayed in the gallery, used for private views and lunchtime concerts, and will be available for the use by gifted students. The School of Art Gallery and Museum (established in 1918 as the Art and Crafts Museum) continues to collect, document, preserve and interpret such objects of educational and cultural value. These artefacts, many of international importance, are not only useful in teaching and research but enrich student experience by studying historical and contemporary works of art at first hand. The Collections not only contribute to the cultural life of the University and the community, but confirm our policy to develop collections as a valuable resource for future generations of students and scholars.

Robert Meyrick
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