

Slate

The history and culture surrounding the slate mining industry has a prominent place in Pontio's opening programme. This is evident in our staging of Chwalfa and the exciting contemporary piece of public art acknowledging the quarrymen's meeting place Caban, which has made its home in the Pontio landscape. To coincide with this, Pontio has partnered with folk group 9Bach to create an innovative evening of new material by musicians, dancers, filmmakers and poets from the quarry-mining town of Bethesda, inspired by the theme of slate. The material also inspired children and young people to make artworks from slate in an associated project led by Community Music Wales. It is against this backdrop that we present a specially commissioned film by digital artist Rob Spaul along with other creative responses and applications of slate by artists, makers and quarrymen from the surrounding area.

Living Slate: Rob Spaul

From one perspective, the slate landscape of North Wales is a ghost of a lost industry. But there are other perspectives from the many lives of the North Wales Quarrymen and their families. The heaps and holes are remnants of a time of productivity, community, family, injustice, hierarchy, poor health, poverty, hardship, faith and belonging. The Quarrymen lived immersed in a world of slate.

This is a perspective that the Quarrymen's intimacy with these dark grey layers of rock allowed the slate to live. To become alive with their humanity. To live through their stories. To shelter them. To take their lives. To feed them. To provide them with an opportunity to define a future for their children.

It explores how slate would have filled their senses of sound, touch, sight and dreams. How slate was under their feet, in their hands, over their heads. How it permeated their entire lives. Rob Spaul

Rob Spaul is a Digital Artist, Musician and Media Developer with over 20 years experience in the Digital Media and Arts Industries. Rob works as a digital artist both in his own right and as part of The Little Light Dance & Digital Theatre he founded with his wife Lisa Spaul. Some of Rob's recent works have included projection mapping productions "Perpetual" with Lisa Spaul and "Overrun" with Little Light's Family Dance Project at Blinc 2015 in Conwy and producing Wendy Dawson's "Swarm" for a 15 Projector Mapping of The Adelaide Festival Hall. This film was funded by the Arts Council of Wales.

Slate Reclaimed: Cefyn Burgess; Catrin Griffiths; Marged Pendrell; Quarrymen

Slate carvings were a form of folk art prevalent in Dyffryn Ogwen for a short period in the early 19th century. Traditional woodworking techniques were adapted for use with this industrial and increasingly available material. The artworks may well have gone unrecognised and unappreciated had it not been for the efforts of Cymdeithas Archeoleg Llandegai a Llanllechid. Over 160 years later, carvings of concentric circles and plant forms provide inspiration for Cefyn Burgess who, through his textiles, brings rich colour and texture to these already striking designs. More recently Catrin Griffiths has utilized the material itself by combining slate dust with clay slip to create a speckled effect, with a nod towards how slate was once used in the dairy as a means of maintaining cool surroundings. Slate chips and dust form the surface of a boat shaped vessel by Marged Pendrell, referencing how slate was transported around the world. Our thanks to Storiell, Bangor University Library and the artists for loaning these items, showing just some examples of how slate has been reclaimed.

