

MAGGIE'S CARDIFF:

*ART,*

*ARCHITECTURE,*

*LANDSCAPE.*

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photographs by Anthony Coleman

## *FAMILIAR, BUT WITH MEANING*

In 1984 an exhibition by the photographer Pete Davies entitled ‘Great Little Tin Sheds of Wales’ caused a bit of a stir. The portraits were based on Davis’ fascination with the variety of these ubiquitous structures often sited in marginal sites and their place and meaning in the landscape of Wales. It was vilified by many, but also achieved great popular success. I suspect these beautiful ugly buildings would still divide opinions but Davis’ images illustrated how the people of Wales have archetypically employed the readily available and economic ‘found’ egalitarian materials in a way that often forges art from necessity.

It seems to me that here the ‘necessary’ embodies the founding ideas behind the Maggie’s – shelter, retreat, gatherings, displacement, contemplation – and these qualities provide the initial stimulus for the sort of places that Maggie envisaged as an antidote to the ‘neglected, thoughtless spaces’ as she wrote in which patients like herself were left to “wilt” under the desiccating glare of fluorescent lights. Wouldn’t it be better to have a private, light-filled space in which to await the results of the next bout of tests, or from which to contemplate, in silence, the findings? If architecture could demoralize patients—could “contribute to extreme and mental enervation,” as she observed—could it not also prove restorative?

To date, the buildings created in her name by a roll call of the great and good in architecture and to basically the same brief have tended to divide, in design terms, into the flamboyant and the discreet. This new Maggie’s contains all the requisite components set out in the brief – a range of activity spaces, private and group

*Wayne Forster is Professor of Architecture at the Welsh School of Architecture*

consulting and the quiet space – the cwtych and the hearth and the central table – inter-connected spaces all under a sheltering roof – daylit so that one is always aware of time and place. The poetic here, and what distinguishes these places including furniture and fittings, is a quiet modesty deliberately sought. A place that will have an easy and comforting familiarity. Familiarity is a common word in briefs for care environments – commonly embodied in pastel colours and risable art.

Here the idea is familiar but with meaning.

Perhaps the Maggie’s at Velindre could be described as flamboyantly discreet? Humility on speed. I listened to Osi Rhys Osmond, the artist whose last work hangs on the back of the cwtych – the picture of the orange mountain behind his parents house in Wattsville, talk about this work. Very modest I thought – but also exuding charisma and authenticity. Osmond explained that Self Portrait would be a piece to wander through; a work that would be perceived differently by every person who encounters it, a sensual journey woven with threads of personal experience. Like the building then.

In a piece of film probably 6 years old I watched Alistair Sooke talking to Osi as they walked around Wattsville. They paused at the back of Osi’s parents house – on the back boundary is a small shed with a corrugated tin roof. Of course there is.



*Chicken Shed by  
Pete Davis, 1984.*

## SKETCHBOOK

Our building is located on a triangular shaped site in the corner of the Velindre Cancer Care Centre car park. The site is unremarkable but backs onto an existing stand of trees.

Our building takes you on a journey from the bleakness of the carpark, through an intimate courtyard garden, into a range of calm and contemplative spaces which focus on the stand of trees and a new landscape garden.

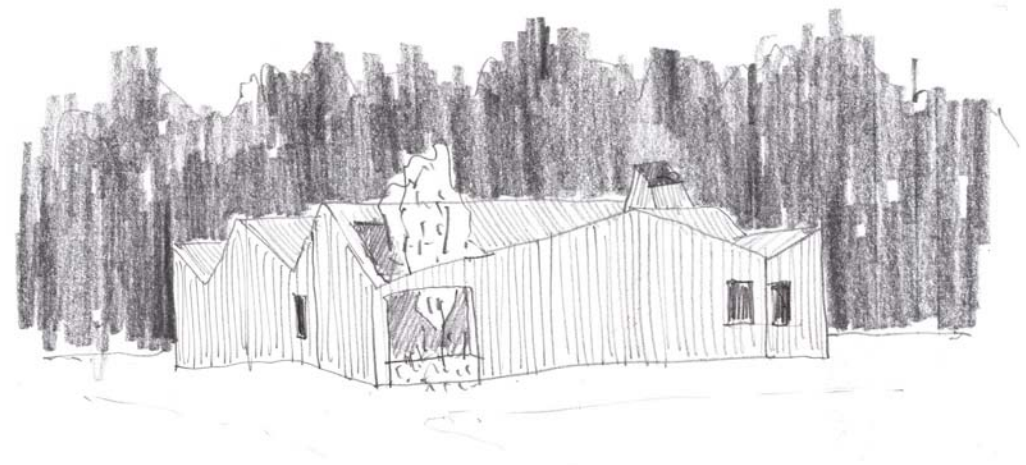
The building's form and materiality seek to reflect the surrounding topography and to provide a range of uplifting spaces that have a strong relationship to nature. The silhouette of the building echoes the shapes of the local mountains and the repetitive gables of the Valley towns, while the rusty wrinkly steel cladding is the colour of the bracken that adorns these hills and provides a strong character to the area.

The interior spaces are formed between Douglas Fir lined walls which have a warmth and softness, and contrasts with the sleek polished concrete floor. At the heart of the building is the cwtch, a tall and intimate roof-lit space, inspired by the *simnau fawr* (big chimneys) of vernacular Welsh architecture.

Inside, the walls of the building are adorned with artworks on loan from the National Museum of Wales, curated as a response to piece by Osi Rhys Osmond found on the cwtch. The building is a rich and enlivening experience thanks to the collaborations with artists and makers who have helped to furnish the building.



*The Hills above Llanthony*  
by Elisabeth Vellacott, Unknown date.



*Concept sketch for Maggie's.*



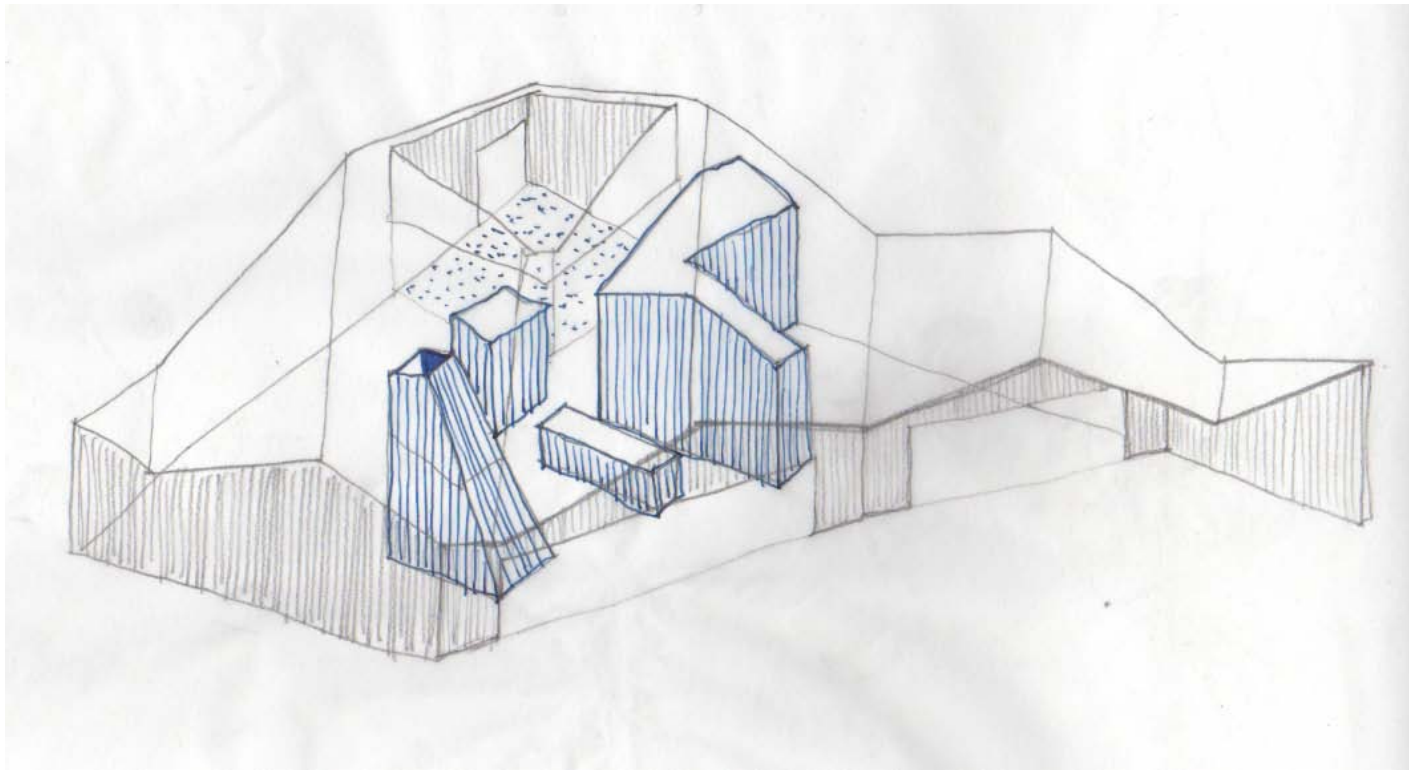
*The characteristic form of Pen-y-fan,  
Brecon Beacons.*



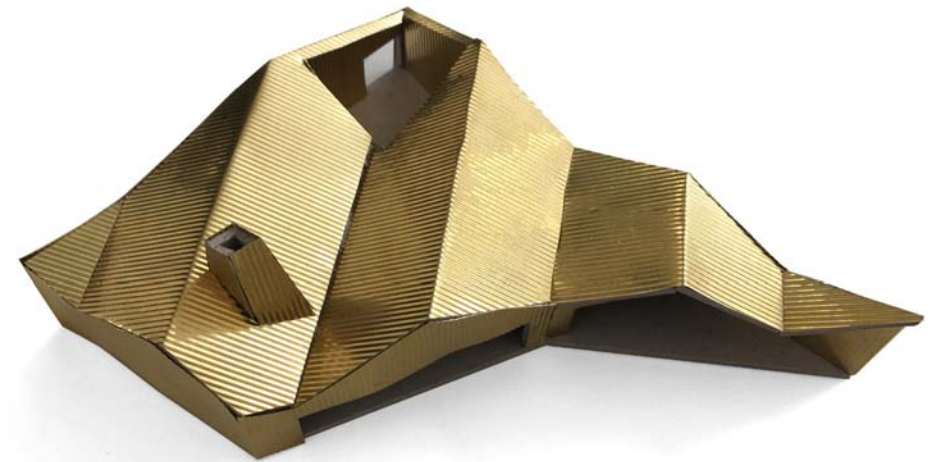
*Sawmill at St Fagan's, Cardiff.*



*Maggie's, Cardiff*



*Forms assembled within a corrugated shell.*



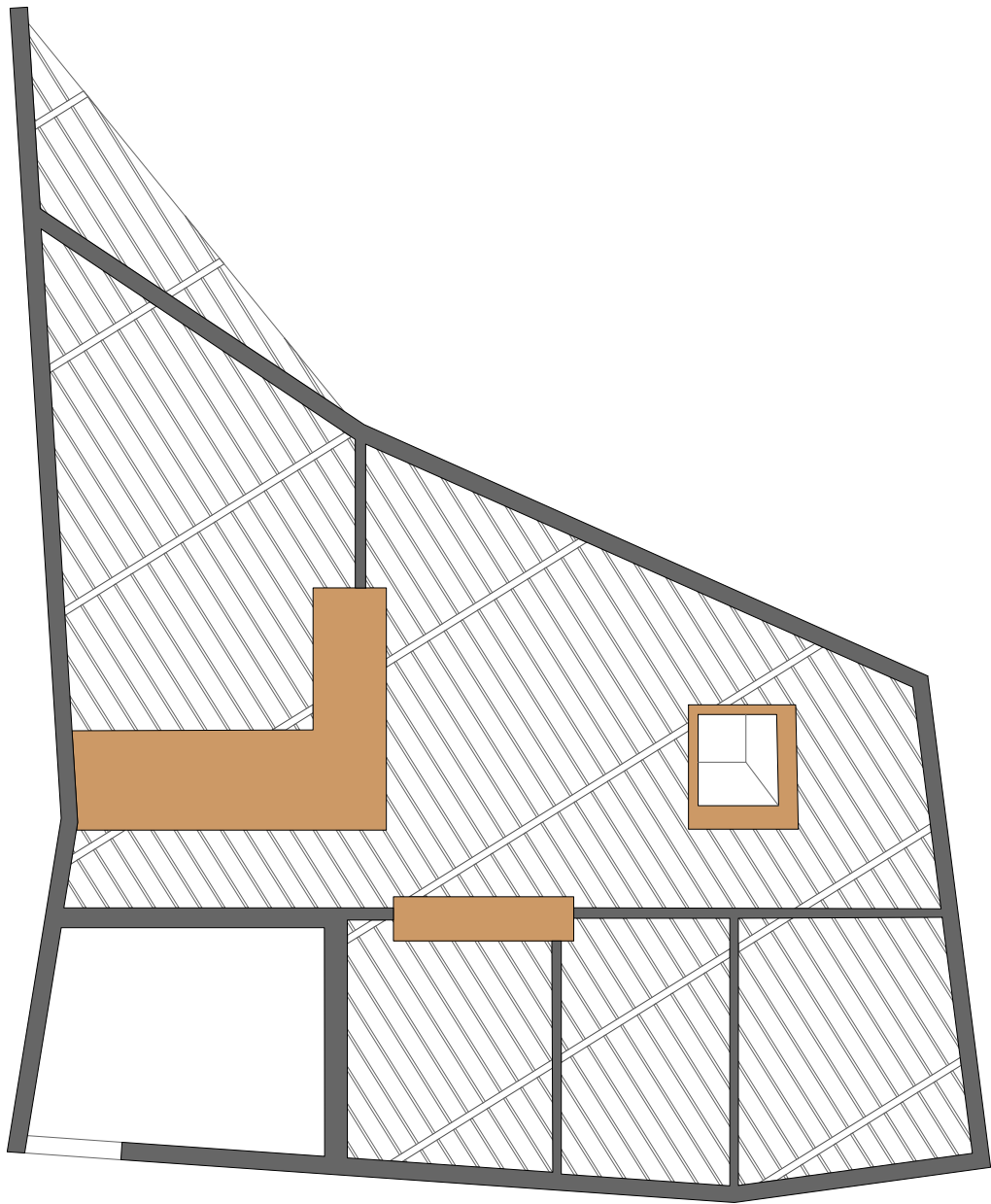
*Initial sketch model*



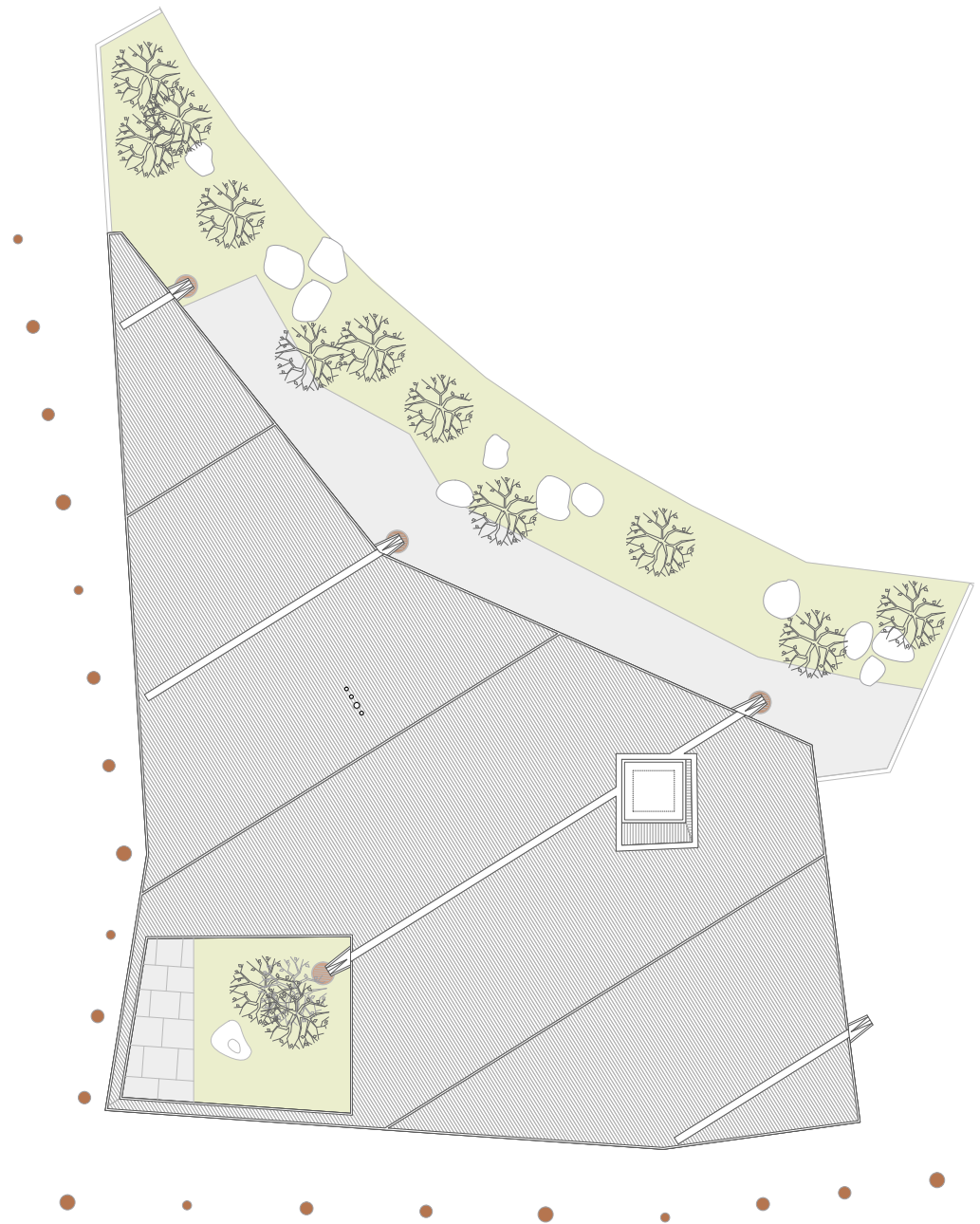
*Site Plan*



*Ground Floor Plan*

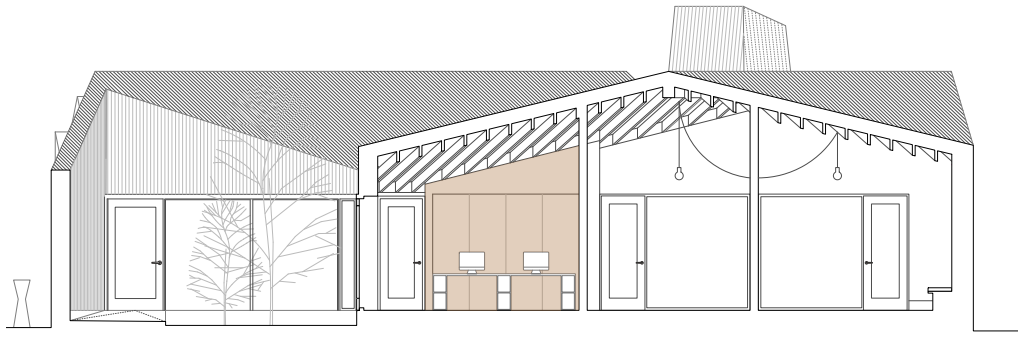


*Reflected Ceiling Plan*

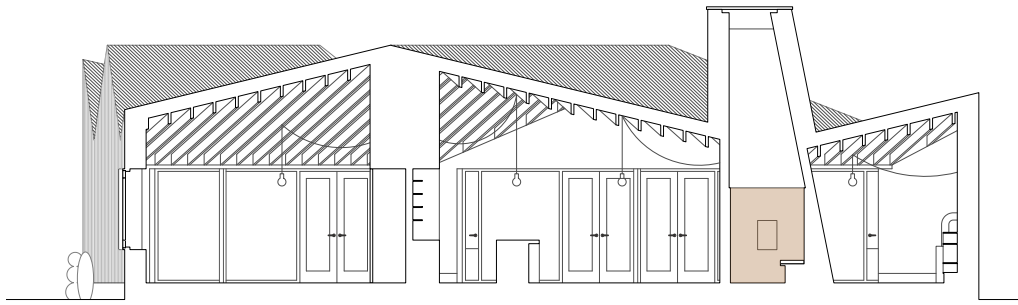


*Roof Plan*

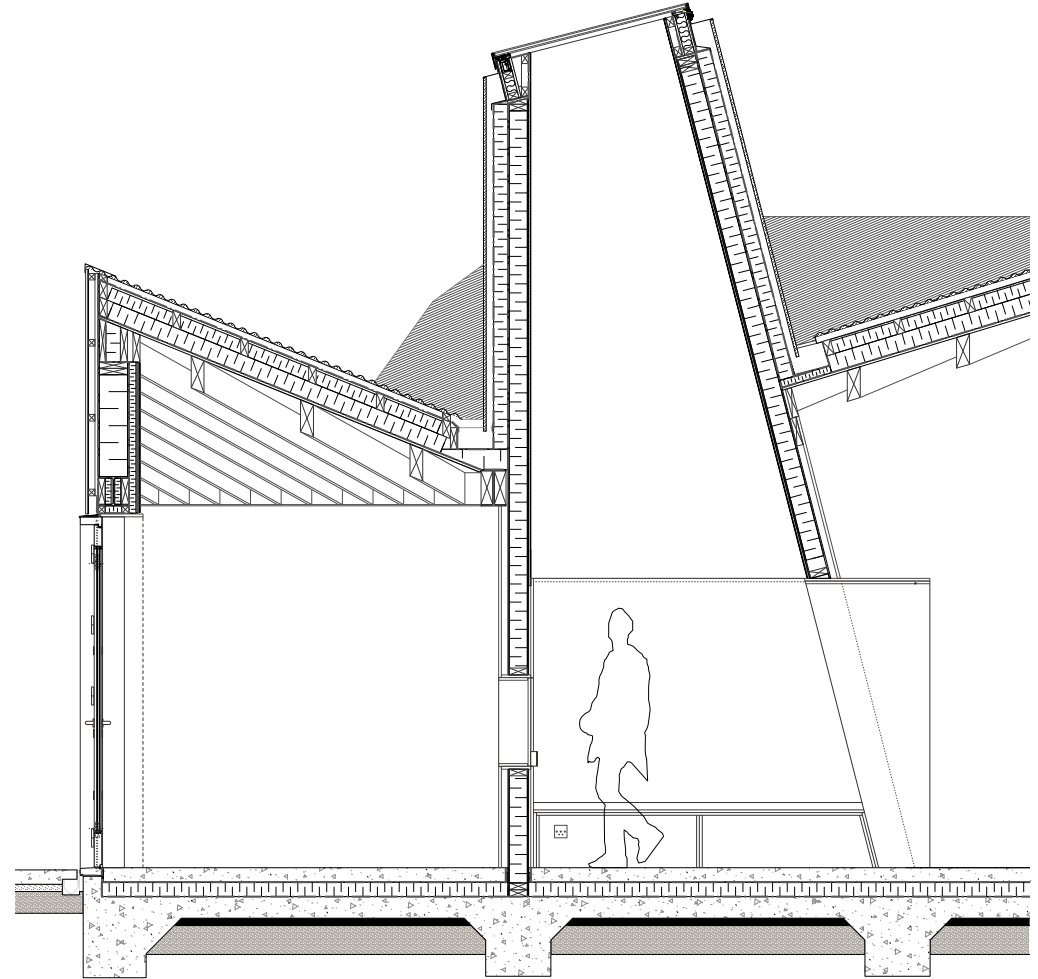




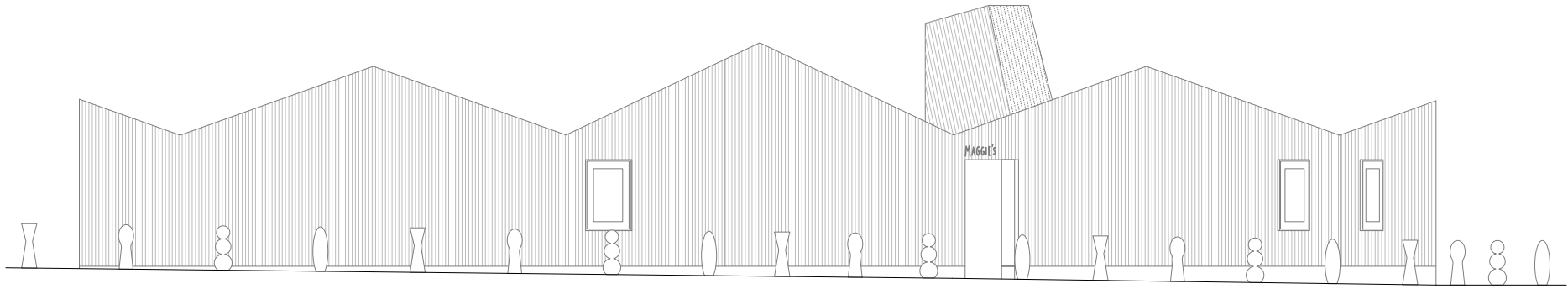
*Section through the entrance courtyard looking north*



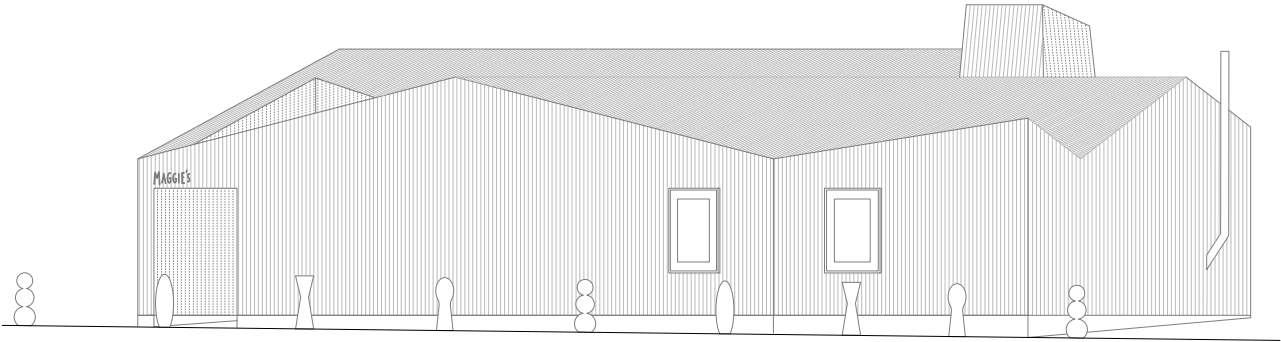
*Section through the cwtch looking north*



*Detail section through the cwtch*



*West elevation*



*South elevation*

## HOME COMFORT

Maggie's Cardiff is the nineteenth building to be completed by the Maggie's Centres charity, which provides practical and emotional support to people with cancer. All follow the ideas about cancer care originally laid out by the late Maggie Keswick Jencks, in which good design is a central tenet. The Cardiff facility, designed by Dow Jones Architects, is located at the Velindre Cancer Centre, north of the city centre in a post-war suburb near the meandering path of the River Taff.

As with other centres, the Velindre site is on the NHS estate and less than perfect; shoved into the corner of a car park close to the boundary of the Whitchurch Hospital site, between an outbuilding and the entrance to an outpatient department. It is roughly triangular in plan, with the short, south- and west-facing elevations addressing the hospital complex and the diagonal facing the wooded boundary to the Whitchurch site.

The architects have chosen to maximise the use of the site, in part due to the need to meet the accommodation brief; as it is, the building has a footprint 25 per cent smaller than your average Maggie's. But as with many triangular buildings there is never an opportunity to view more than two elevations so its sum can be seen to be greater than its parts.



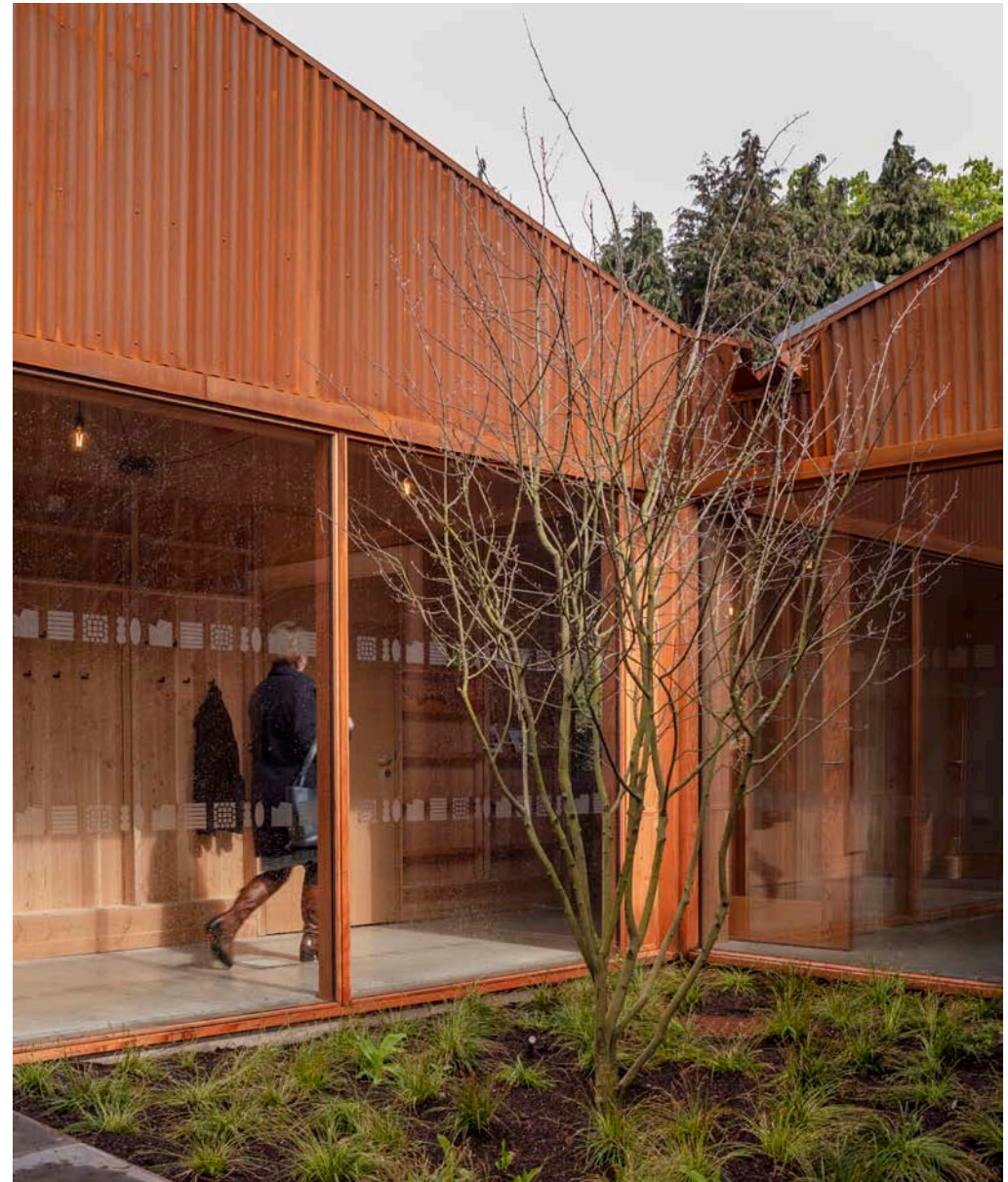
*This article was first published in Architecture Today vol. 299.  
Niall Maxwell is a director of Rural Office for Architecture.*

The entrance is on the orthogonal southern corner of the plot, at the edge of a sea of tarmac which forms a crossroads of routes to and from various parking facilities. The site boundary is demarcated by a tightly clustered line of oversized cast iron bollards, originally designed by Antony Gormley for a Peckham regeneration scheme in 1994. They consciously mark out the centre's territory and defend it from the inevitable pressure of overspill parking; their corroded colour matches that of the corrugated cladding which adorns the building's walls and roof.

From a distance this rust-clad form provides a moment of vibrant colour within its drab post-war setting, with a contrasting backdrop of deep evergreen from the tree canopy beyond. The form and colour of the building are intended to resonate with the vernacular language of the Welsh rural landscape, referencing the region's red sandstone, or the autumnal colour of bracken on nearby hills. This loose narrative becomes a starting point for a simple conceptual language that can be read throughout the building, which is played out with great restraint and modesty.

The corner entrance takes you into a small open courtyard garden, designed by Cleve West, which offers a welcome antidote to the car park. It's a clever ice-breaker designed to orientate the visitor, providing a view of the reception and a glimpse into the heart of the main space. A glazed entrance corridor that overlooks the courtyard takes you directly into the main space, which contains the kitchen and dining area around which Maggie's centres are focused.

It is only at this point that the building's third elevation becomes evident. The long hypotenuse is fully glazed, as if a square plan has been sliced in half to open up the building. The facade frames a view to the stand of trees beyond the boundary and adjacent ditch, with the concrete terrace in the immediate foreground creating the perfect *mise-en-scène*, extending the depth of field to give the impression of a deeper landscape when viewed from the interior.



This geometry helps to explain the building's idiosyncratic roofline. The ridges of a series of 45-degree pitched roofs are set perpendicular to the hypotenuse, leading to contingent elevations on the orthogonal sides and asymmetric interior volumes. The main space looks out through the glazed wall to the trees. It is flanked on the orthogonal sides by more private rooms of varying scales that can open up to provide connection and flow, or close down to provide intimacy or focus. They range from the domestic to the communal and reflect their flexible use for contemplation, consultation, group discussion or yoga.

Douglas fir is used throughout the interior as a unifying material to subdivide, frame and enclose spaces by means of what Dow Jones describes as "giant pieces of furniture within the landscape of the building". This is most evident in the centre of the plan where a small 'cwtch' is inserted – a room within a room with a view of the sky from the top of its tall chimney form. Inspired by a visit to St Fagan's National Museum of History in Cardiff, this hideaway recalls intimate spaces of traditional domestic Welsh architecture, such as a cupboard under the stairs or a small inglenook range in a rural farmstead. It epitomises the domestic scale and warmth evident within the building, working to provide visitors with familiar points of reference when trying to make sense of their personal situation.



This warmth is set against a polished concrete floor which runs throughout the building, only broken by carefully selected rugs and soft furnishings that domesticate the range of rooms and break-out spaces, while also softening the acoustic. This concrete is extended onto the terrace where its edge follows the geometry of the overhanging roof, as if cast in shadow. It's all very subtle, understated and confident in execution.

This triangular constraint, if one can call it that, is certainly the strength of the building, as the plan form represents a confident handling of such geometry to create a simple but spacious domestic interior. There is an economy at play with the material, scale and reference of this building which sincerely reflects the Welsh community it is designed to serve; a comfort for those looking for familiarity when in their greatest need.



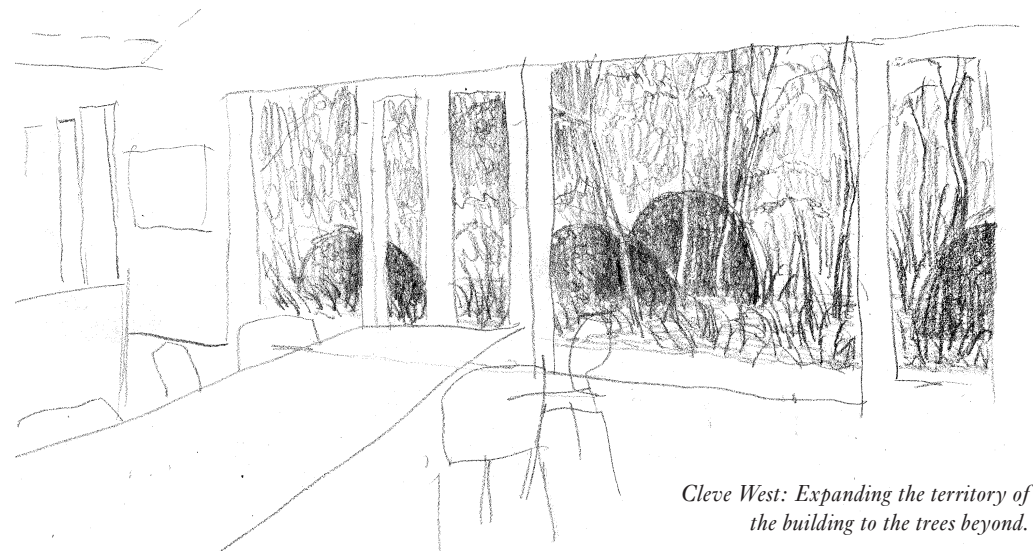
## A MAGGIE'S LANDSCAPE

Landscape defines a great deal of what it means to be Welsh. It has haunted our poetic imagination for millennia and provided the raw material from which the country has built an identity. But like most things that are close at hand, there is a tendency to take it for granted. This is certainly the case for the raw beauty of the Valleys landscape, where the juxtaposition of nature and artifice is often shocking and serves to reveal the traces of times, and lives, gone by. Our building is looking for ways to bridge the gap between what is always there and the potential to see something anew.

Landscape also defines a lot of what Maggie's is about, in particular the therapeutic and calming influence that proximity to nature provides. Maggie herself was an scholar of Chinese garden design, and her love of the subject has played an important role in the ethos of the Centres. We approached Cleve West, whom we had met through our project at the Garden Museum in London, to work with us in Cardiff. Cleve trained as an artist before moving into landscape design, and his work has a clear resonance with the narrative and spatial capacity of nature.

The site for our building was a sea of tarmac, and apart from a stand of trees behind the site, totally devoid of nature. The design for the building grew out of the idea to make an entrance courtyard that would be full of nature, and act as a buffer to the bleakness of the carpark. It would also serve to foretell the view of the trees that sit behind the building and provide direction to the interior. Cleve has subtly and cleverly woven nature through the building in a way that realises the initial ambition to connect the building to the landscape.

*Alun Jones is a director of Dow Jones Architects*



*Cleve West: Expanding the territory of the building to the trees beyond.*



*Cleve West: An immersive entrance courtyard*

## GARDEN LIFE

Some of the most alluring spaces we experience are the ones that we can't physically get to. However, not being able to immerse oneself among plants in the rear garden might be a source of frustration to anyone with a conventional idea of how a garden should work.

The intention is that the borrowed space beyond the ha-ha serves as a backdrop to the building that visitors to the centre can enjoy both from inside and out along the adjacent path. The simple ivy bank serves to minimise any distraction from this view.

Clearing the lower branches of the conifers revealed hulking forms that animate the space, not unlike a Peter Doig painting or some David Nash tree art. 'Nests' made from dead twigs and random logs that punctuate the space will in time be consumed by ivy to create habitat mounds. Random elm and cherry will come and go, some left to decay with dignity. Brambles will fight dog-rose, honeysuckle and clematis for the upper hand while foxglove, fern and tufted hair grass will accentuate the notion of woodland edge.

The hope is that visitors will find beauty not just in the seasonal notes that manage to get a foothold in this challenging patch of ground but also the less familiar tangle of nature and the (often invisible) life it sustains.



*Cleve West: Underplanting beyond the ha-ha*



## NOTES ON ART

At the heart of Maggie's South East Wales is a work by Osi Rhys Osmond, given by the artist for the new building. Other works on display here are generously loaned by Amgueddfa Cymru National Museum Wales, together with some from my own collection.

I first talked to Biba and Alun about their wonderful ideas for a Cardiff centre at a screening of this film. When thinking about other works for the building, I had in mind what I knew of Osi's personal associations and enthusiasms.

On one hand, then, there are works by artists from or living in Wales who use painting: Mali Morris, Brendan Burns, Terry Setch, Emrys Williams. These artists often relate to specific places, or to ideas of what is really there before us in the world versus images that live in our memories and imaginations. Osi chaired the Wales at Venice advisory committee, a role I had also previously occupied. So there are also two works by Bedwyr Williams and Sean Edwards, artists who have represented Wales at the Venice Biennale.

Outside the building are bollards made in 2001 by the renowned sculptor Antony Gormley. Inside, there are furnishings sourced in Wales, including a new set of ceramic items by the Cardiff based artist maker, Lisa Krigel.

*Mike Tooby is Professor of Art at Bath Spa University, and was formerly the Director of the National Museum of Wales*



*Self Portrait*  
by Osi Rhys Osmond, 2015.  
Watercolour and mixed  
media on paper.  
Collection of Maggie's  
South East Wales.

### OSI RHYS OSMOND

Osi was an artist, writer, curator and activist. Towards the end of his life he decided to make this work as a gift to the planned Maggie's Centre in Cardiff. It has therefore always been present in the architects' ideas. Its title, of course, ensures we see the picture as a visual story of Osi himself: his sense of place, and the experiences that shaped him. He talks about the work in a short film, *'My Brief Eternity: Ar Amyr Le'*:

*The work to me is a mystery...I will never succeed but I will come to a point where I will abandon it and it will never be finished... My artwork is a story, a narrative, a 'psychogeography'...It's almost like a punctuation mark isn't it? But its not a conclusion, a summary, an end. It's the beginning - it will exist after me.*



*Angel and People*  
by Mali Morris, 1978.  
Oil on canvas.  
NMW A 29432

#### MALI MORRIS

Mali Morris is a painter from North Wales who currently lives in London. *Angel and People* is a very carefully created, delicate and subtle painting made almost forty years ago. She has said of it:

*I was fascinated – and still am – by how colour constructs light, which opens up the space in a painting. It’s as if another world is being formed, and the way in which it happens, as the painting evolves, becomes almost a subject in itself. The title was given after a friend saw the painting and made a personal connection with angel’s wings: ...I liked the different sounds made by the words ‘angel’ and ‘people’, almost a rhyme, and the pairing of the words proposed the idea of a conversation, or an appearance.*

*Etch*  
by Brendan Burns, 2009.  
Oil and wax on board.  
NMW A 29671



*Shimmer*  
by Brendan Burns, 2009.  
Oil and wax on board.  
NMW A 29432

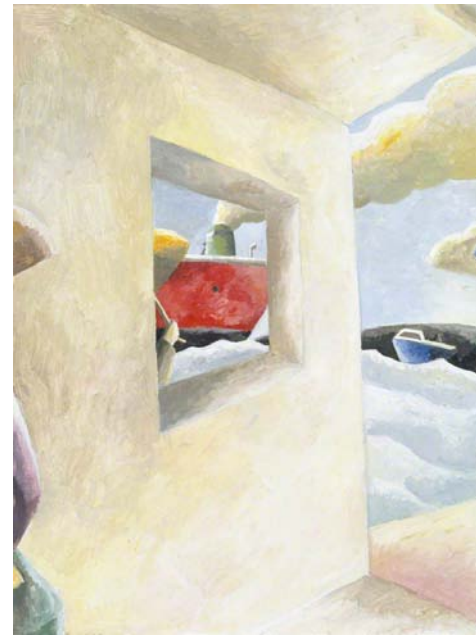


#### BRENDAN BURNS

Brendan Burns lives and works in Cardiff, but has always loved the Pembrokeshire coast. These paintings are simple and definitely ‘abstract’, but full of associations with the textures, colours and sense of space of the beaches of South and West Wales. They were part of a bigger group. These all have one-word titles that prompt us to associate different senses of smell, touch and sight, whether ‘close to’ or seen from a distance.



*Oil Sketch for Cardiff Bay*  
by Terry Setch, 1992.  
Oil and wax on board.  
NMW A 2650



*Sheltering II*  
by Emrys Williams, 1994.  
Gouache on board.  
NMW A 2859



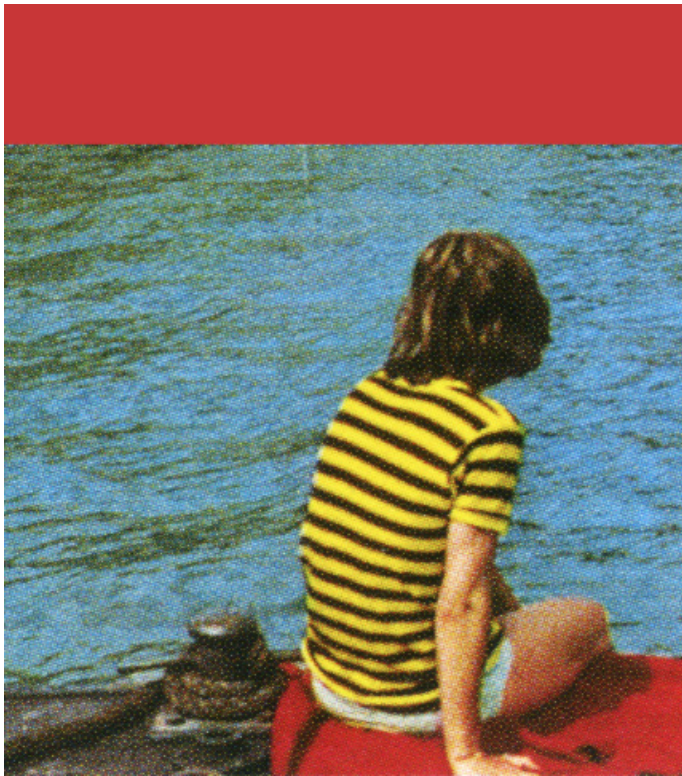
*Sheltering I*  
by Emrys Williams, 1994.  
Gouache on board.  
NMW A 2858

## TERRY SETCH

Terry Setch lives in Penarth, and is very familiar with its beach and Cardiff Bay. He often works on a very large size, but here has made a tiny study of sailing boats. The surface is built up layers of colour and wax – much of his work comments on pollution, and this texture also reminds us of the mud flats of the Bay before the barrage enclosed its water.

## EMRYS WILLIAMS

Emrys Williams' paintings are playful: serious jokes about the way paintings can toy with our ideas of what we see 'on' and 'through' the imaginary spaces created on a flat surface, just as an architect considers light, views and space. Emrys lives near the North Wales coast, and his images echo the scenes he sees round about him; or perhaps he is tempting us into asking what our memories are of seascapes and harbours?



*Everything Looks Better In Hindsight*  
by Molly Rooke, 2017.  
Digital print.  
Courtesy Gallery 10

#### MOLLY ROOKE

Molly Rooke is from Devon, and studied at Cardiff School of Art & Design. Her work often picks up the question of what we experience as tourists. This image is from a series where a detail in a post card is magnified and other areas blocked out: the dotted surface is a clue. We can only imagine where the person is, and indeed who they might be.



*'Drawn In Cursive'*, Chapter Arts Centre  
by Sean Edwards, 2013.

#### SEAN EDWARDS

Sean Edwards lives in Cardiff. This year he represents Wales at the 2019 Venice Biennale. The work in the cwctc is from an exhibition he made at Chapter in 2013. For this exhibition Sean used very carefully produced timber units and false walls to change the experience of Chapter's public spaces.

This print uses traditional marks made by joiners to note precise alignments - in order to make the beautifully made frames and the empty white spaces of the paper sit perfectly into a corner. Its as if balance and connection is made within a silent, empty space.



*The Starry Messenger*  
by Bedwyr Williams, 2013.  
Gold block foiling on Windsor  
Berkley tissue lined rayon book cloth.  
Private collection.

#### BEDWYR WILLIAMS

Bedwyr Williams grew up in north Wales, where his family still live. He represented Wales at the Venice Biennale in 2013. His exhibition for Venice took two related themes: the mysteries of the night sky, and a celebration of the amateur astronomers who enjoy making home-made observatories. This image appears to be a constellation – but in fact the stars can be joined up to make whatever we choose in our own imaginations.



*My Brief Eternity:  
Am Amyr Le*  
by Brightest Films, 2015.  
Film.

#### CLARE STURGESS

Clare Sturgess is a Welsh film maker who lives in Cardiff. *My Brief Eternity* documents the making of the last artistic work of renowned Welsh artist Osi Rhys Osmond. It explores his reflections on the power of art – its role and significance in his life, and its value in coping and living with cancer. The film provides an intimate portrayal of the artist's mindset, thoughts and feelings using a gentle, sensitive approach. Osi explores art as a prism for capturing life, and the creative process as a metaphor for living and dying.

In the last month of his life, Osi began work on a watercolour painting for Maggie's Cardiff. The piece, *Self Portrait*, layers colour, images and text to create a piece inspired by his own story and his home town of Wattsville. It is a piece to wander through; a piece that can be experienced differently by every person who encounters it. Osi discussed his vision with Biba and Alun who designed a special place within the Centre where the painting will hang. Though the work remains unfinished it stands alone as a beautiful artefact that captures Osi's sense of hope, which will enrich the Centre and the experience of all who visit.

The film won a Bafta Cymru for best short film in 2016.



*Cityscape Tableware*  
by Lisa Krigel, 2019.  
Stoneware clay, glazed, sanded and polished.

#### LISA KRIGEL

Lisa is a Cardiff based ceramicist who was born and educated in New York. Her work investigates the dialogue in the ceramic tradition between function and meanings of forms. She is particularly interested in how her pieces, when stacked in different combinations, recall modern architecture.

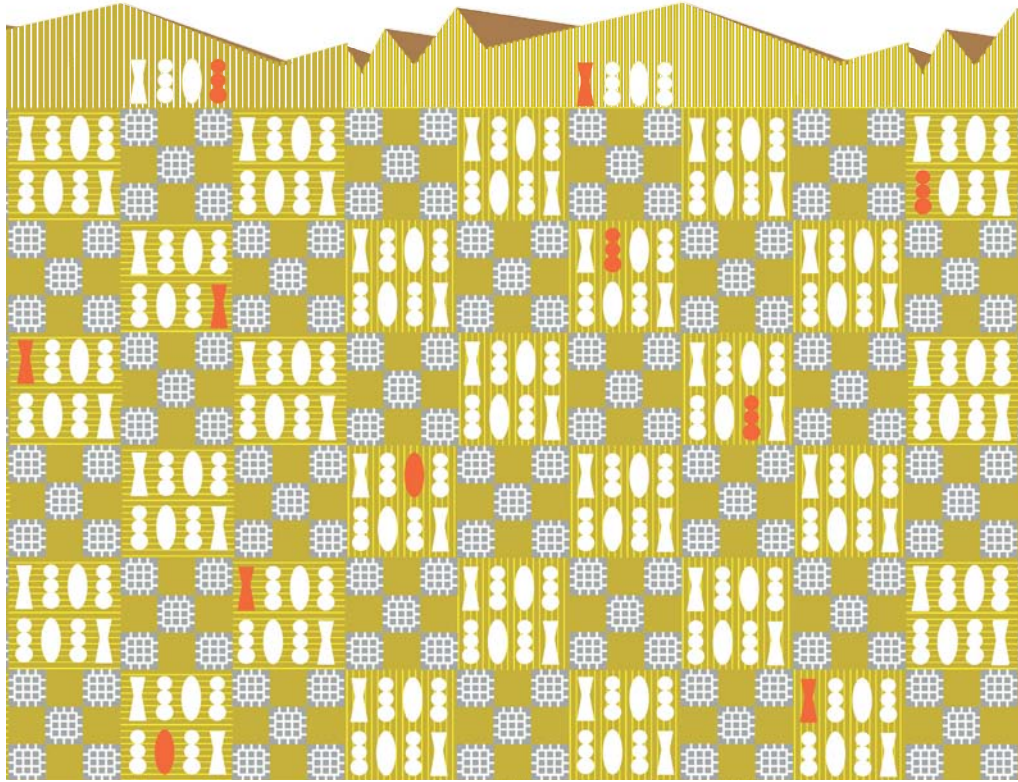
*I hope for my work to be the focus of intimate meals, dinner parties and celebratory events, where opportunities for storytelling, discussion and debate are created.*



*Bollards*  
by Antony Gormley, 2001.  
Cast iron, numbered reproduction.

#### ANTONY GORMLEY

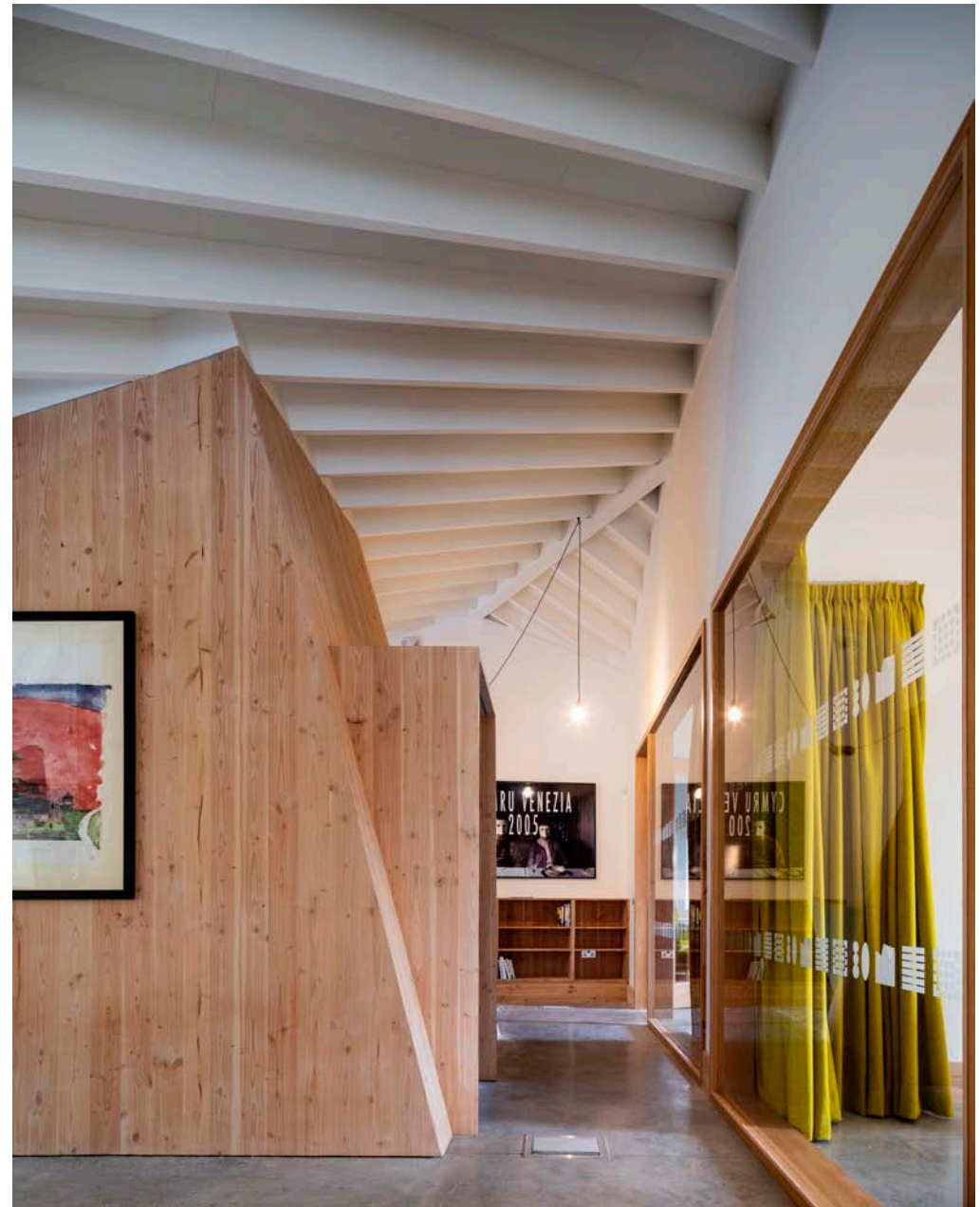
Outside the building are bollards made in 2001 by the sculptor Antony Gormley, designed for the streets near his studio in Peckham, South London. These reproductions in cast iron were made specifically for the new building.



*Blanket*  
by Linda Florence, 2019.  
Digital print on ceramic tile

#### LINDA FLORENCE

Linda Florence is from Glasgow and lives and works in London. She draws inspiration from the materials, craft practice and historic and social context of the project site, and builds a narrative for each project. She has worked with Dow Jones Architects on a number of public projects. The piece for Maggie's takes the images of the elements of the building to weave a blanket of imagery.



## MEMORY AND EXPERIENCE

Displaying art in a domestic setting brings a particular power, a resonance between the special view of the artist's perspective, and the familiarity of everyday life. While a Maggie's Centre is not strictly domestic, the brief looks to the scale and informality of a house as a way of generating a sense of comfort and intimacy.

Onto this layering of art and life, Mike Tooby's thoughtful curation of art responds with a wider connection between art, landscape and building. He draws a connection between Osi's *Self Portrait*, the generating work in our building, and the other works touching on similar themes by artists who knew or have been influenced by Osi.

Osi's *Self Portrait* was made for our building when he was visiting Maggie's in Swansea as a patient. Too ill to meet, he none the less made the imaginative leap into a shared project, and we talked on the telephone about memories of places and how a building might make connections to its surroundings.

Osi described *Self Portrait* as a psycho-geography, reflecting on the significance of particular places in his life. The painting contains fragments of landscape and text, a layered representation of landscape and memory moving between background and foreground across the time of a life lived. A flash of orange draws a particular mountain into focus: the distinctive presence of the mountain to the south of his mother's house in Wattsville.

*Biba Dow is a director of Dow Jones Architects*

Alun grew up in the lea of another brackenish mountain range in Caerphilly, five miles to the north of Velindre Hospital. Spending much of his childhood playing outside in the woods, and studying geology at school, descriptions of the form of the landscape where he grew up have always been foremost in his memory. It is from him that I have learned words that describe landscape like 'escarpment', 'bluff' and 'moraine': incantations of the formation of our physical landscape.

Velindre Hospital serves a wide community, with many visitors travelling from not just the city but from across South-East Wales. We wanted to make connections to a wider context; the hulking orange form sits both as a reference to the surrounding landscape and reads as a condensed townscape of irregular pitched roofs. While the site affords little external space, and the building presents itself to the car park as a carapace, it opens itself up within to internal and external spaces connected by light and long views. The materials that make the building, inside and out, are designed to have a colour and a texture that encourages engagement: a pause or register of some kind.

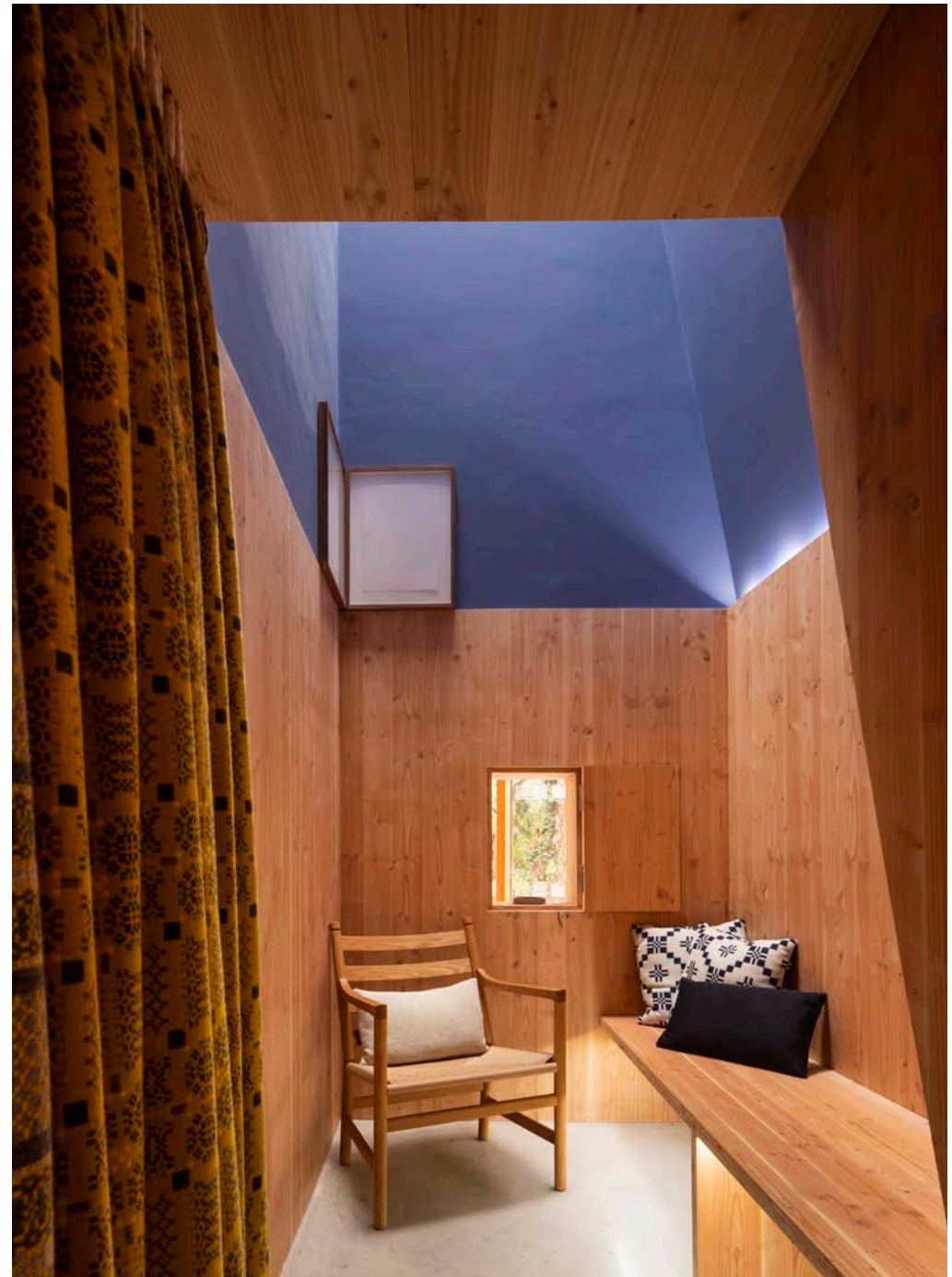
Mali Morris' work *Angel and the People* floods the living room with colour and vibrancy, an effusion of light which she describes as a conversation, and this piece sits like an encounter between the physical space and the life around it.



While most of the spaces are designed to draw people together, at the centre of the building is the cwтч, a space to sit in private, an interior cave lit from above, where the voices of others can be muffled in the background and a shutter closes the window. The word cwтч means both a small space and a cuddle.

The cwтч rooflight projects through the mountain-form of the roof, bringing the sky inside, and making the space both tall and intimate. Mike has placed here a companion pair of drawings by Sean Edwards, hung like a hinge off the douglas fir-lined walls, which describe the joiners' notation or witness marks to make a corner. The two prints meet at a corner, emphasizing their convergent placement and the wooden walls they sit on, describing the restorative privacy of the cwтч.

The corner prints are held in counterpoint, a balance that opens up from smaller moments to wider places and narratives, to Osi's brief eternity.



## *AFTERWORD*

We are incredibly pleased with our newest Centre that Biba and Alun have created for us at Cardiff, and at the same time we are quite incredulous! Hemmed in by security fences, car parks and access roads, this strangely-shaped corner site was the only one available to us within the heavily developed Velindre hospital campus. The prospect that the hospital might one day move and we might have to move with it was another issue that perplexed us.

How Biba and Alun have done what they've done – how they've realised a building that does everything in Maggie's original vision – a place of calm and an uplifting environment that is so important the people who visit our centres, is quite, quite beyond us. A truly wonderful building for which we at Maggie's are extremely grateful.

*Chris Watson is the Property Director of Maggie's*

