

DYLAN WILLIAMS

*Lie down and listen to the
ground breathe*

30 March - 24 April, 2022

FORTNIGHT INSTITUTE

21 East 3rd St. NYC
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In Dylan Williams' painting, an unconscious and conscious process of re-tracing, through the land, is key. He makes and repeats walks, from dawn to dusk. Long summer daylight extends these expeditions over 12 hours; an emersion; a meditation into place. As light levels fall and forms emerge from the edges of vision, memory, and imagination, metaphors and narratives, begin to populate the mind's eye and the pictures' plane. Williams follows familiar routes into the hinterland of his home, to places he knows from teenage cycles and family walks around the lands and wastelands of Afan Valley and the retelling of family history, speaking again of these places known to him through his family's past work, when the disused coal mines were fully active and his ancestors were down in the ground below the thin grass or up on the mountain building the hills. His paintings are renditions, resonations of stories and songs, sung and sunk into the earth. These are not distant *landscapes* over there, but are here in the presence of earth, trees, wind, water, *here*, in his hands, under his body; his walking feet, his waking daydreams. The distant places in the paintings are nearness, past, and/or future.

Past and future are also very present in Williams' paintings. The shock of happening upon a wind turbine: A huge metal, airplane-like, pale-coloured, smooth-surfaced structure, strange and incongruous, with their enormous propellers truing the persistent westerly winds into electricity, which like the coal from years ago, connects the here, the this of this place to their of over there.

The past is not washed away in cycles of storms and rains which punish these deserted places. The past is evident in the 19th Century abandoned mines, whose derelict and overgrown buildings are embedded in the land, together with mining's resulting slag heaps, which shape the curve of the hills, and before them the ancient peoples who walked the mountain top routes or who followed the rivers. This place has many ancient sites, remnants of standing stone circles, cairns, and prehistoric habitation, Williams listens.

The relationship between art and land in Wales is ancient and direct. Wales is a small country in terms of geography and population, much is difficult terrain, mountains, woodlands, marshes, and wetlands, however, in a small distance, you can encounter, coast, forest, moor, and mountain, rivers, waterfalls, caves, cliffs, and lakes; every type of habitat. The breadth and beauty of the countryside together with its power and changeable weather made it a key destination in the late 18th and 19th centuries for artists and poets looking for the Sublime, the Romantic, and the Picturesque. In the late 18th Century, J.M.W. Turner, traveled great distances around Wales, painting and drawing the many castles, mountains, and weather. William Gilpin's, late 18th Century, *Observations on the Wye Valley*, was extremely influential in the development of the notion of the Picturesque and in 1774, the Welsh classical landscape painter, Richard Wilson, in response notions of the Sublime, painted the haunting, shockingly stark and stripped back, *Llyn-y-Cau Cader Idris*. This was the beginning of *Landscape* painting as we understand it today. In the 19th Century, Wales became a popular destination for those

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in search of 'landscapes'. This continued into the 20th Century, when Romantic painters such as Graham Sutherland and John Piper worked extensively and often exclusively in Wales, significantly developing a modernist sensibility to landscape.

In Dylan Williams' new work, he draws out the layers of time and experience, the long-forgotten voices of miners walking to work, the prehistoric peoples gathering at the solstice. He listens to the ground, to the stories told by trees, and he paints. He paints a re-imagined metaphorical place, which grows out of the earth and takes its shape, like trees bent by a prevailing wind, the forms in his work have to be. And here he is, day after day, hour after hour, in the landscape, part of the place, a place, a story, he shares with us all in these paintings.

Text by Catrin Webster

Dylan Williams (b. 1995, Wales) lives and works in Swansea, Wales. Williams received his BA and MA Fine Arts degree from the Swansea College of Art. This is the artist's first exhibition in the US and his first exhibition at the gallery.