

THE CELTIC STRUGGLE

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This is an account of the background of art and its institutions in Celtic countries, with specific reference to Wales in its struggle with the Anglocentric.

Halstatt, La Tène, the rise and decline in Celtic domination of "the first Europe" was demonstrated by a major exhibition in Venice, last year. The rise and fall of Rome, followed by Germanic invasions concealed the Celtic foundations everywhere except on the western approaches of Europe.

Wales, Ireland and Scotland were then taken over at different dates. To control the aboriginals history had to be rewritten, Celtic art and language suppressed, cultural appropriation, censorship and self-censorship exercised.

English military forts in Wales were superseded by exclusively English townships, and in the countryside topographical water-colourists were followed by popular tourism, holiday homes and new rural settlements.

The conventions and institution of art, including colleges, museums and galleries have been dominated by London or taken over locally by English artists and administrators. In this system many important and talented Welsh artists have influenced the nature of English art only by having to go through the proper English channels.

Until recently the visual arts in Ireland were less famous than its literature. But Scotland was an important influence in 1890's, with wealthy Glasgow merchants as constant patrons. Recently confidence and talent has resurfaced there.

"Celtic Vision", the creation of two people, has toured pan-Celtic exhibitions internationally, including Galicia, Brittany, Cornwall etc. A few organisations have begun to support "artists in Wales" and even Welsh artists, while colleges and museums remain anti-Welsh.

The Welsh language is a key factor in all this:

Several journals, and organisations such as "Gweled", discuss and look after the arts in the language, as well as "Becca", an overtly political art group. Welsh literature since the 6th century has stimulated artists and projects: most recently, the trust "Cywaith Cymru" organised the landscaping of a large park to commemorate writers of Venedocia.

One or two art historians have published research on Welsh art, past and present. Perhaps a history of the search for cultural and national identity over the past 200 years will soon be written.