

Appendix 3: A review of the exhibition

Noel Williams's Poetry Exhibition: Exploding Poetry

By Adam Smith

Published: 15/02/2010

From: *Forge Today*: <http://www.forgetoday.com/default.asp?contentid=1389>

Who gives a poem meaning? Who owns poem? When is a poem not a poem, and who makes this decision? These are questions that are arguably as important as poetry itself.

They will certainly be familiar to any English literature students that has had to grapple with the works of Rowland Barthes and Michel Foucault, each of whom address the effective 'death of the author'. They are also questions that have characterised Noel Williams residency at Sheffield's own Bank Street Arts Centre, and now provide the inspiration for his latest poetry exhibition: 'Exploding Poetry'.

Another pertinent question at this point might be 'how can you exhibit poetry?' This was certainly a question in the forefront of my mind, as I arrived at the Georgian Terraces that make up the Bank Street Arts Centre. The answer however becomes obvious when one considers William's mission objective, which is to 'take poetry off the page.' The exhibit itself is not so much an exhibition as an experience, and I urge you to visit for the sheer surrealism of it.

Upon entering from the street the viewer finds themselves in a large white room, scattered with balloons pumped to the point of combustion, each containing words which will be blown like confetti around the room should a balloon explode. This is the white space: the empty interpretive void between each room of the exhibit. The first of these is the 'poetry lounge', a room decorated in fragments of poems both canonical and otherwise; inviting the reader to bring to them both value and meaning.

In a second room, titled 'Garden of Stones', the viewer finds a white space with a floor piled with small stones; upon each of which is written a different word. In a third room are four television sets. Unsynchronised, the sets each play their way through ninety poems in forty voices, accompanied by disjointed animation. From the centre of this room a viewer is simultaneously bombarded with several poems, forcing their brains to select what information they assimilate, meaning that each poem interprets the experience in a different way. There are other rooms in which the visitor is similarly subjected to seemingly random fragments of information and invited to derive from it a unique and individual interpretation.

However, the ambition of this exhibition is more complicated still. Despite appearances to the contrary, what looks random has actually been carefully constructed to give the illusion to chaos. Every word and every space has been minutely managed to encourage the reader to assimilate the given information in a certain way, and in that, the exhibition works exactly like a poem. This genuinely is poetry off the page, and is undoubtedly worth a visit.

The exhibition runs until March 6th.