

China Sketchbook: An Exhibition of Drawings by Mervyn Rowe of his Travels in China

Between 4th and 9th November 2013, the Confucius Institute at Bangor University hosted *China Sketchbook*; an outstanding exhibition of drawings from British artist and designer, Mervyn Rowe. The 46 sketches on display, inspired by Mervyn's recent travels in China, capture a disappearing world; a China of ancient temples, lost villages and forgotten landscapes as yet untouched by modern progress. On his travels to places such as Beijing, Shanxi, Shaanxi, Gansu, Anhui, Haikou, Hebei and Xinjiang, Mervyn recorded natural landscapes, architecture and scenes of daily life, spending two or three days sketching before painting; a challenging feat for a painter in his 70s. These works are not merely reproductions of subjects and landscapes, but a beautiful and thought-provoking collection that captures the spirit of China in a uniquely emotive way.

Mervyn Rowe was born in Cambridge, and received professional training in painting and graphic design at Cambridge and Manchester Colleges of Art. Mervyn's work has often been presented in major British exhibitions and art galleries. He also won first prize in the British East Anglia Painting Competition. Over a period of 50 years, Mervyn has been active as a senior stage designer for dramas, film and television in the UK and across contemporary Western Europe.

Bangor University's Confucius Institute presents

CHINA Sketchbook

North Wales-based artist and designer, Mervyn Rowe, presents an outstanding exhibition of drawings inspired by his recent travels in China.

"...a refreshing glimpse of an unreported China... an insight into a diminishing culture."

Exhibition

Monday-Saturday, 4-9 November, 9am-5pm
Rathbone Hall, College Road, Bangor University

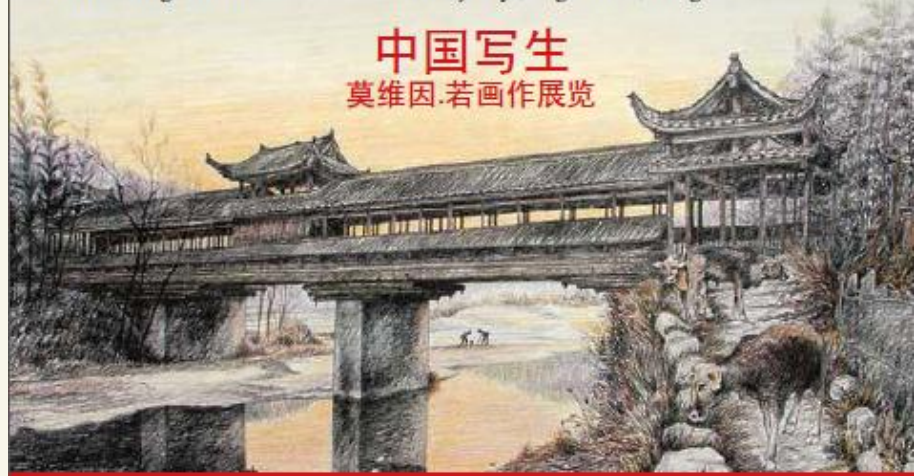


An Evening with Artist Mervyn Rowe

Friday 8 November, 7-8.30pm

Free of charge, drinks and bar snacks
available to buy from 6.30pm
Blue Sky Café, High Street, Bangor

中国写生 莫维因·若画作展览



Opening ceremony

The exhibition opened with a private view for invited guests on Monday 5th November with more than 50 people attending. Distinguished guests included the Mayor of Bangor; creative practitioners in the art, film and television industries; staff from Bangor University faculties including Law, Music, Business, Modern Languages and International Development; contacts from Chinese community and other key stakeholders. The opening speech was delivered in three languages (Welsh, English, and Chinese) by Dr. David Joyner, Executive Director of the Confucius Institute, and Co-Director Prof. Liying Zhang. Mervyn Rowe then went onto to give a wonderful description of the history and experiences of British artists visiting China since the 19th century to depict Chinese society and cultural customs, and expressed his gratitude to the Confucius Institute for supporting the exhibition.



1. Opening speeches by Dr. David Joyner, Prof. Liying Zhang and Mervyn Rowe.
2. The Mayor of Bangor with Mervyn Rowe and his wife, and Confucius Institute Directors.
3. Film and television professionals attended the ceremony.
4. Private view for invited guests.





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The audience's favorite five

During the exhibition, the Confucius Institute encouraged visitors to vote for their favourite five drawings. *Anhui Hong Cun*, a beautifully descriptive sketch featuring ancient buildings reflected in the Ji Yin Stream, proved to be the most popular, closely followed by other works including *Footbridge in Longsheng*, *Mao's Refuge*, *Waterwheels along the Yellow River*, *Qing Courtyard in old Beijing*, *Mount Maiji*, *Yungang Buddhist Caves* and *Bezelik Buddhist Caves*.

1. *Footbridge in Longsheng*, Guangxi (the 'Wind and Rain Bridge') was also very popular with visitors.
2. Artists visiting the exhibition.
3. Art dealer, Mr Huw Dafydd Williams, thought it was a fantastic exhibition.
4. Comparing Mervyn's sketches with book illustrations.
5. To decide which is the audience's favourite five.



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6. The audience's favorite painting:
Anhui Hong Cun.



Stories behind the Drawings

Every piece of work had its own story was one of Mr. Mervyn Rowe's drawings' features. Accompanied by his wife, Mr. Rowe spent several years travelling all around China. He believed that it was amazing to travel over Northern China, to view much and enjoy the buildings in their historic settings, but also the detailing of eaves tiles, roof ridges in all their numerous forms and glazed tiling.



Old Courtyard & Dwellings/ Tianshui.Gansu

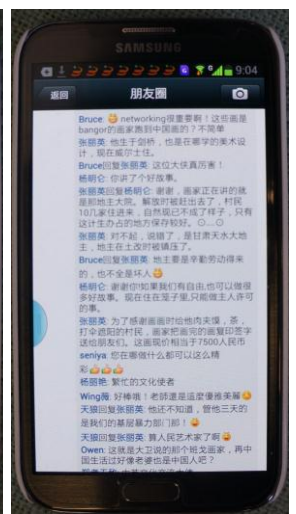
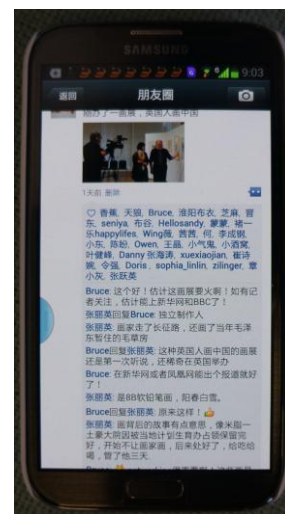
The drawing Mr. Rowe was introducing to us was the Old Courtyard & Dwellings in Tianshui, Gansu.

This seemingly ordinary quadrangle dwelling brought us a great deal of surprise at the time. In today's China, there were very few quadrangles which maintain their original appearance, if they were not for the relics of some famous men. But we unexpectedly found such a house in a small alley.

This big three-row quadrangle was originally part of a local tyrant's luxury house in Tianshui City. During the land reform movement, the landlord was executed. One part of the house was taken over by a branch of the local government. This situation did not change even during the Cultural Revolution. So, this courtyard has luckily survived to this day and maintains its original shape. Today, it is the Birth Control Office of Qincheng District, Tianshui City.

Mervyn Rowe's wife happened to fall ill and had to get a penicillin injection in a private clinic nearby. Mervyn Rowe continued his drawing in the courtyard those days. At first his wife was worried that no one would take care of him. However, when his wife returned to the courtyard, she found that he was not only taken good care of, but also "spoiled". Someone brought him water and tea, someone bought him steamed bread with meat fillings, and someone even held an umbrella for him to keep off the sunshine. Two days later, after finishing his sketch, Mervyn Rowe presented photocopies (in black and white) of the picture with his signature to the friendly people here in answer to their request, and to thank them for their kindness. Everyone was satisfied.

Mr Rafael Panko, the independent TV producer, coming from London to shoot the exhibition. Prof. Zhang posted the picture in her Moments of Wechat, and soon it received a lot of attention and supports from friends all over the world.

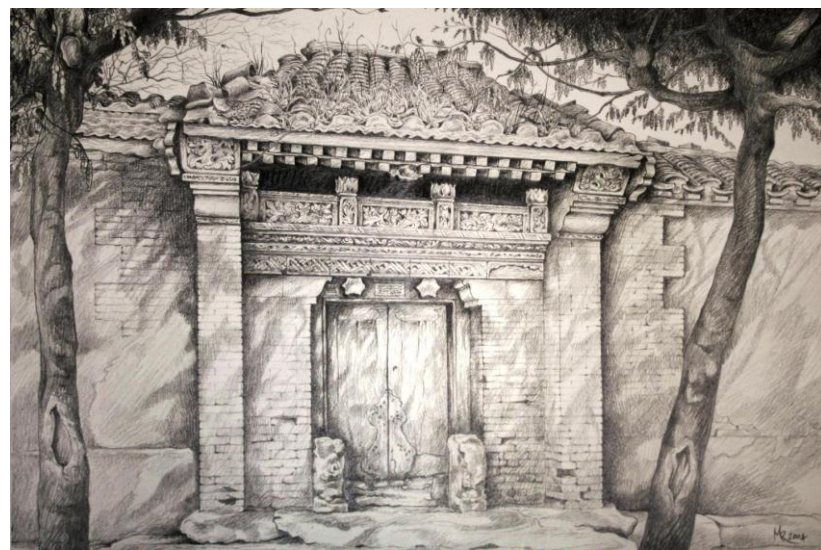




Stories behind the art - artist's talks

In his talk at Blue Sky Café, Mervyn also talked about his motivation for creating his own favourite piece: *Entranceway, Old Beijing*. Here, Mervyn's eye was caught by exquisite lintel of brick carvings atop an ugly bricked-up wall (once a beautiful gateway). Saddened by the evident decline of such beautiful architecture, Mervyn set about making a sketch to capture every detail before the scene was lost to history; a theme that is recurrent in his work.

As well as making an appearance at Blue Sky Café, Mervyn also visited a local school (Ysgol Friars, Bangor) earlier that day to talk to sixth form art students. This talk was very well received and the students seemed genuinely inspired by Mervyn's experience, particularly with regard to his success in maintaining his independent art practice alongside a working career.





Book signing and picture sales

A book signing also took place during the exhibition, featuring Mervyn Rowe's 2007 book: *Beautiful Journey*, written by freelance author Little Grass. This includes 50 drawings from Mervyn's travels and gives the reader a fascinating introduction to Mervyn's works and the background and history of the places he has visited in China.

Several copies of the book were sold as well as a number of drawings from the exhibition including: Old lady of the Yao People and Mao's refuge, Pingdeng, Longsheng, which depicts a shelter where Chairman Mao Zedong once stayed during the Long March.



The sketch of Old lady of the Yao People was bought by Mr. Keith Richards, who worked at Wales TV.



Feedback received

Here are just some of comments received in relation to the exhibition:

"Thank you so much Mervyn! What a fabulous insight into ancient China and its current situation."

"Brilliant paintings. I really want to go there now!"

"So tranquil, exquisitely drawn. Such attention to detail, so glad I came to have a look."

"[The drawings] touch me when I see them [with] my own eyes. It's totally different from seeing or admiring these works online. From the Internet, I cannot see the delicate and subtle changes among colours, hue. In the exhibition, on the other hand, I can to some extent understand some of the feelings of the artist, his love for the architecture and people, and his life as well. If I have time, I will definitely come here every day."

"Diolch am waith arbennig iawn – excellent craftsmanship with spirit."

"Beautiful record of your journey. Thanks for sharing it with us."

"Wonderful historical record – let's hope some of its splendour can be preserved. The exhibition has inspired me to try to get to some of these places."

"Enjoyed this exhibition. Beautiful capturing of vanishing history."

"I get a very impressive feeling and feel proud of being Chinese."

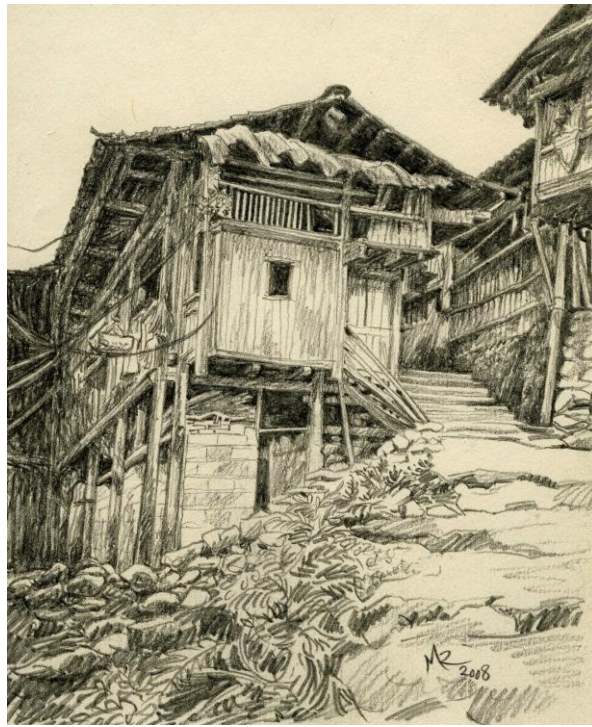
"Beautiful use of shading; seems to capture the extraordinary ordinariness."

"A lovely exhibition, so peaceful."

"Enchanting pictures that evoke feelings that convey one to the places shown."

Review

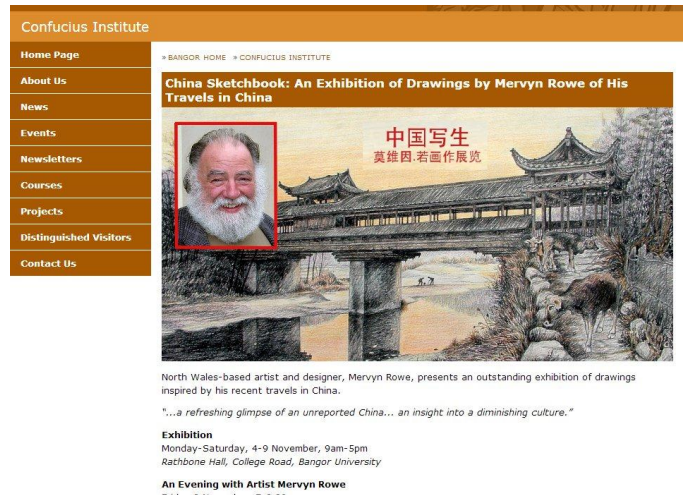
Marketing material produced for the exhibition included posters and flyers as well as official invitation cards and a free exhibition guide. Social media (Facebook and Twitter) was also used to promote the event, and there was significant presence online via both the Confucius Institute's website (www.bangor.ac.uk/confucius-institute), Bangor University's homepage (www.bangor.ac.uk), Pontio's website (www.pontio.co.uk) and various local listings sites. An advert was also placed with local media (North Wales Chronicle), and a press release sent to the same newspaper resulted in some good PR for the Confucius Institute with an article about the exhibition appearing on Thursday 31st October, four days ahead of the exhibition.



The drawing entitled: *Mao's refuge, Pingdeng, Longsheng, Guangxi* depicts a shelter where Chairman Mao Zedong once stayed during the Long March. This drawing has been ordered.

News about the exhibition remained on hanban.org for four days after the event finished.

Screenshot from: www.bangor.ac.uk/confucius-institute



Newspaper article published in the North Wales Chronicle, Thursday 31st October 2013

Images of China from county artist

A NEW exhibition in Bangor will show a Gwynedd artist's reflections on China. Mervyn Rowe, of Barmouth, will unveil drawings of ancient temples, lost villages and forgotten landscapes in China Sketchbook,

at Bangor University's Rathbone Hall from November 4 to 9. The Cambridge and Manchester College of Art graduate works as a freelance theatre designer on S4C, BBC Wales and Hollywood productions including the comedy series C'Mon Midfield.

China Sketchbook will be open from 9am to 5pm. Mervyn will give a free talk about the exhibition at the Bluesky Cafe in Bangor from 6.30pm to 8.30pm on Friday, November 8.

Over 150 people attended the exhibition during the six day period it was open: 50 of these at the private view and a further 25 at Blue Sky Café. Confucius Institute volunteers were invaluable in helping to set up and invigilate the exhibition, and feedback from the exhibition was overwhelmingly positive with several books and drawings sold. Perhaps the most positive outcome for the Confucius Institute, however, was in realising such a prestigious exhibition that not only celebrated Chinese culture in north Wales, but invited people to glimpse a vanishing world and think about the disappearing traditions on their own doorsteps.

Follow-on activity

Following on from the success of Mervyn Rowe's exhibition at Rathbone Hall, it is proposed that a second exhibition of Mervyn's work is staged in Bangor between 18th January and 1st March 2014; this time in collaboration with Gwynedd Museum and Art Gallery. Such a collaboration will further artistic and cultural exchange between north Wales and China, as well as strengthening relationships between Bangor University and one of the most prominent cultural institutions in the city. Setting the exhibition within an established public arts venue – and for a substantially longer period – will undoubtedly extend its reach, and it is hoped that partnership with the museum will also enable further development of an interpretation strategy (i.e. the creation of new audio/visual/web material, further outreach work with schools and colleges, public lectures and associated cultural events).



The second exhibition will also coincide with Chinese New Year (31st January 2014) and it is hoped that related activity can be planned around this date. The content of the original exhibition will need to be reviewed in order to accommodate the specific requirements of the museum venue, but a significant amount of the marketing work has already been done, which should enable a relatively quick turnaround.

The exhibition in pictures

Enjoying the private view

Confucius Institute Directors, Dr Wei Shi and Prof. Liying Zhang, show Mervyn potential exhibition spaces within Bangor University.



The exhibition in pictures

Security is also a painting enthusiast

Vicky, Prof. Zhang, and Zhihui arranged the cocktail party.



Independent TV producer Mr Rafael Panko came to shoot the exhibition.

Tanking photos, videos.
Edit Content.



NEWSLETTER 17
November Special 2013



Putting up and
taking off the
drawings.

Volunteers helped
to invigilate and
set up the
exhibition.



CONFUCIUS INSTITUTE AT BANGOR UNIVERSITY



A snapshot of comments from the comments

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