

Walker & Bromwich / Searching for a Change of Consciousness @ Talbot Rice

Walker & Bromwich's work is gargantuan. Gargantuan in size, its aims and its geographical range. A performance duo creating colossal, inflatable sculptures exploring politics, economics and the climate crisis, Walker and Bromwich have worked with communities in Denmark, Wales and the Colombian Amazon.

Talbot Rice brings together work from several of these projects in a poignant, if rather, overcrowded celebration of community, hope and a call for change.

Greeted by the *Serpentine of Capitalism*, a behemoth snake representing the voracious and catastrophic nature of capitalism, one cannot help but wonder why a sculpture designed to move, be seen and be in the natural environment has been ensnared within the columns of a gallery? Whilst emphasising the scale of the sculptures I wonder if this setting does the work justice? Might there also be an irony in a work denigrating capitalism being presented in an institution under scrutiny for their seemingly capitalist admissions policies?

With these questions looming I sit in a black tent-like structure, watching a film of a ritualistic, celebratory performance, which took place in Glasgow, at the *Encampment of Eternal Hope* showing the monumental reptile in all its glory. Accompanied by feverish drumming and wailing calls, The Minga Indigena and the Organisation of Indigenous People of the Colombian Amazon recount the disastrous impact of capitalism on their communities and the need for action. Here the audience can really relate to the work, connect it with the wider world and its intended purpose and be fully appreciated.

Beyond the snake, the towering stalagmites of the coal black inflatable sculpture *Llechi A Llafur // Slate or State* explores the division caused in Penrhyn, a small Welsh town, when the workers of the quarry, embarked on one of the longest strikes in history. Crammed into a classical style gallery it does little to evoke any emotion but viewing the processional performance, the sculpture carried aloft by choir members, bearing the weight of the sculpture and the history it symbolises like pallbearers, it is easy to feel the monumental significance of this event.

A backdrop of rugged Welsh mountains and grey terraced houses, the landscape and people of the community add a dramatic juxtaposition to the sinister and mournful sculpture. A solemn group of choir singers accompany the last leg of the procession- chilling tones, lamenting the fracture that still exists in the community.

The procession ends at Penrhyn Castle- the former home of Lord Penrhyn, the quarry's owner, an opulent and ostentatious residence built with profits of the transatlantic slave trade. The boastful affluence and extravagance only serve to underline the stark divide between the master and his subjects, helping the audience inhabit the rage at the poor conditions and pay the workers rallied against.

Documenting the first time some of the community entered the castle, Walker & Bromwich seem to suggest hope in the reclaiming of such a symbolic building.

It is this that the artist duo does so well: suggest hope, suggest a path for change, suggest a change of consciousness that may well lead to something even larger than their monumental sculptures.

Essay by Beth Cockerline, May 2025.

Walker & Bromwich / Searching for a Change in Consciousness continues at Talbot Rice Gallery, Edinburgh: 15 March - 31 May 2025.