

GALLERIES

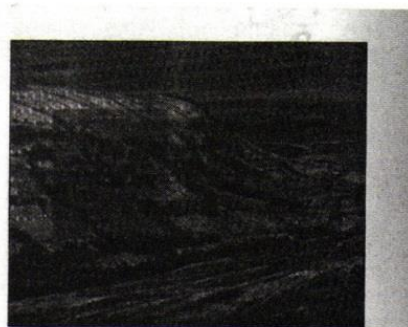
CONTEMPORARY CELTIC

Caroline Juler

Twelve paintings each by Haydn Cottam and Dan Llywelyn Hall are showing at **Oriel Washington** from 11 March. Though seeing themselves as traditionalists the love of landscape Llywelyn Hall (one of Cottam's former students) and Cottam share is expressed with a refreshing voice, the reference to Celtic imagery justified through its focus on the Scottish Highlands and the Brecon Beacons – locations closely associated with Britain's ancient history, and the subject of romanticising paintings before, both in the Romantic period and many times since.

Many of Cottam's pictures show recognisable places treated with an intensity and lyricism that emphasise their magnificence. In the more neutrally titled *Valley* and *Hillside*, Cottam recreates the deep russet and green colouring of the bracken-covered, rain-rich Welsh mountains in early spring.

Another element sets his work apart also: in each canvas he paints one or more rectangular areas as though these were windows through which he could see the image better, with more light and clarity and sometimes more vividness too. It is hard to say which area of his paintings is the more real; there is no change of handling or content between the two and it's more as though someone has turned on a light in a slightly dimmed room. With outlines like skyscrapers, these rectangles are subtle graphic devices intended to show that Cottam is aware of looking at nature almost literally through rose-coloured spectacles: he believes that city-dwellers have their own expectations of the countryside because they live in such a different, hard-edged, walled-in environment. His paintings represent his own dreams of escaping from London's turmoil.



Haydn Cottam 'Valley'

Turmoil lies at the heart of Dan Llywelyn Hall's images, in which mountain peaks and reservoirs explode into view as though the planet were being created before our eyes. It looks as though he has chucked paint at them too, because in several pictures dark drip marks make patterns like rude boys' graffiti. These pictures are fun: as good as a cold shower in the morning and possibly more lasting.

'Farming and the Welsh Landscape' at the **Royal Cambrian Academy** until 13 March presents a gutsy alternative with 43 artists celebrating the centenary of the Royal Welsh Agricultural Society ●

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