

# Blaengar Book Review

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## *Blaengar*

Published by Blaengar, edited by Dafydd Prys.

This compact yet attractively put together publication seeks to offer up a record of the first two projects undertaken by the Mid-Wales based artist group Blaengar.

Blaengar, a term that encapsulates what in English might be described as 'progressive', 'pro-active' or 'cutting-edge' is the name chosen by this artists group, founded in 2006 by Ceredigion based lead artist Alice Briggs. Over the past two and a half years the group has worked on a number of unconventional and challenging projects through collaboratively realised site-specific exhibitions and events. These projects have allowed emerging artists from the mid-Wales area to make an important grass-roots contribution to the art scene in Wales and to a bolster their own artistic experience in exciting directions.

Site-specific is a term that neatly captures the group's modus operandi so it is logical that this book is laid out largely on a project by project and hence site by site basis. With introductions from Adrian Kear and Miranda Whall, leading professionals and lecturers with Aberystwyth University's Theatre, Film and Television Studies department and Art School respectively we are immediately assured of Blaengar's important role within contemporary art practice in Mid-Wales. These introductions explain Blaengar's status as part of Aberystwyth University's Spinout Program and draw attention to the meaningful links that it has forged with its surroundings: the local community, both academic and more generally. Whilst Blaengar's attempts at fostering links with the university are admirable, particularly its program to work collaboratively with students in the Annual Blaengar Associate Studentship, I feel that the heavy emphasis right at the beginning of the book on the group's status as a 'Spinout Organisation' of the university does slightly detract from the group's own pro-active initiatives and links with other elements of the community, outside of the academic sphere. I hope that it will be possible from the group to continue to work productively with the university whilst avoiding being inadvertently swallowed up within it.

Looking beyond these introductions we have another brief introduction to the group itself that sparingly sketches out an overview and locates the group within contemporary practice. Whilst I would have liked to have read more on Blaengar's place within the development of artists groups in a Welsh and international context, I appreciate that this may not be the time or place, for that we may have to wait for the benefits of a greater critical distance. The book does not seek to do this, instead it seeks to produce a record, a testament to the exciting, imaginative, diverse, challenging and engaged practice evident within two otherwise very transient projects. This is a goal that it achieves admirably, recording the projects through an informed display of beautiful and evocative photographs, perfectly balanced through an elegant design, with succinct and enlightening passages about the various works shown. The works are of consistent quality and stand on their own, hence need no real discussion here. It is worth stressing, however, that whatever the strengths of these works, they are inherently transient - being temporary, site-specific and outside the orthodoxy of the gallery system. As such, a book such as this becomes vitally important to avoid the potential danger that the work is overlooked, passed-by or marginalised by the mainstream of art discourse. This is the book's real achievement - exposing to a wider audience and documenting for posterity an innovative and important collection of works. It forms a record of works that have often taken place

under the radar in this quiet corner of Wales and often with no more impetus than the impressive determination and initiative of the artists involved.