A world first - William Roos solo exhibition at Oriel Môn, Anglesey

William Roos (1808-1878) was one of Wales’ most successful portrait painters. He was known for his portraits of the famous people of nineteenth century Wales – often these were done from memory but he also painted landscapes and commissions of families and favourite animals. The exhibition will be the first time so many paintings by William Roos will be together – having been curated specially by renowned art historian Peter Lord. It will be open to the public from 1 February to 5 July 2020 at Oriel Môn, Llangefni, Anglesey.

Support from the Weston Loan Programme with Art Fund has ensured the loan and conservation of William Roos’ work from the national collections of Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales and the National Library of Wales. Created by the Garfield Weston Foundation and Art Fund, the Weston Loan Programme is the first ever UK-wide funding scheme to enable smaller and local authority museums to borrow works of art and artefacts from national collections.

Councillor R. Meirion Jones, Education, Youth, Libraries and Culture Portfolio lead, stated “It is important that works from national collections that are relevant to Anglesey and Wales can be hosted at a venue like Oriel Môn. The loans of work by William Roos and the exhibition will give prominence to the work of a local artist who contributed so much to our national story. We are grateful to the Weston Loan Programme with Art Fund, National Museum Wales and the National Library of Wales who have helped make this possible.”

Sophia Weston, Trustee of the Garfield Weston Foundation, said: “This is a wonderful opportunity to showcase William Roos’ work to a much wider audience. We are delighted that the exhibition will shed new light on Roos’ talents and introduce his work to visitors who may not be familiar with his paintings and their significance to Welsh culture.”

One of the four paintings on loan from Amgueddfa Cymru - National Museum Wales is a painting of John Jones, Talhaiarn titled ‘The Bard in Meditation’, c.1850-1864. John Jones, Talhaiarn was a famous poet who commissioned a number of portraits of himself by Roos. He was also a friend and admirer. ‘The Bard in Meditation’ is a remarkable likeness to the sitter but also demonstrates Roos’ knowledge of a Welsh visual tradition – as he references earlier bardic imagery. The painting of Margaret Thomas, Llangaffo is one of 20 works that will be on loan from the National Library of Wales. It is one of
his most highly finished works and is an example of the prosperous farming families from whom Roos found commissions as he travelled looking for work. He also painted her husband, Hugh and sons.

Alongside the loans from national collections and private individuals, there will also be two works that are new to Oriel Môn. Esther Roberts, Senior Manager at Oriel Môn wrote "As part of a wider project to bring attention to the genius of William Roos, Oriel Môn have been able to secure two paintings by William Roos for the collection. Previously, he was not represented in the collection. The support from the National Lottery Heritage Fund has enabled the purchase and conservation of two paintings by William Roos for the collection of Oriel Môn and will ensure that they will be on show in this exciting new exhibition and cared for in a public collection in the long term."

Stephen Barlow, Head of Engagement for the National Lottery Heritage Fund in Wales, said: “Thanks to the support of National Lottery players, Oriel Môn are able to add to their public collection by purchasing and conserving two paintings by the renowned local artist, William Roos. For the first time, Oriel Môn will now exhibit and interpret William Roos' work to those who visit and live on Anglesey, that will be in their ownership, and will encourage individuals and groups from the community to take part in interpreting his life and work, providing insight to a local artist that was one of Wales’ most successful portrait painters’.

Born in Amlwch, Anglesey, William Roos travelled widely to make a living – across Wales, Liverpool and London and became one of the best attested exemplars of nineteenth century painting practice in Britain. Although not many people are aware of William Roos’ significance today, this solo exhibition, the first of its kind, will give an opportunity to learn from and be inspired by his contribution to Wales’ art history. This world first exhibition that brings together so many works by William Roos will be inspiring. Running from 1 February until 5 July 2020, the exhibition has free admission. Oriel Môn is open daily, 10am-5pm.

Signed copies of Peter Lord’s new book, William Roos and the Itinerant Life, published by Oriel Môn, 2020 will be available. The Oriel Môn Trust has supported the publication.

There will be a number of community and schools workshops as well as events for the public to enjoy including lectures, an event to share information and images about Roos as well as portrait drawing sessions.

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