

Dan Rees: Return Journey

By Adam Carr

The title, *Return Journey*, finds pertinence as a reflection on Dan Rees' return to his place of birth. Yet, among the numerous homecomings made by the artist, this particular occasion is one that distinguishes itself from the rest, harnessing a special significance. Born in Swansea in 1982, Rees lived in the city until the age of five when his parents relocated to East Sussex. It seems wholly appropriate that *Things I Did When I Was A Young Man*, the artist's first solo exhibition in any public institution, should not take place in Berlin – where he currently resides – Paris, New York, or any other artistic gentrified city in which the artist has stepped foot, but rather in Swansea, a place which for him feels like home. In addition to signalling Rees' personal history, *Return Journey* makes reference to a creative individual whose work perpetually informs Rees' own development as an artist, yet who also plays a key role in Swansea's own creative output and reflection. The title derives from a prose writing composed by Swansea's DYLAN THOMAS who, like Rees, travelled to other lands while always regarding Wales as home. Marked by an overwhelming sense of nostalgia for his birth town, THOMAS' work is suffused with anecdotal humour and perhaps best defined by an acute observance of lifestyles typical of those in small Welsh towns. Rees shares many of the same interests, which serve as key among other ingredients that shape his work.

A journey returned is a notion acknowledged by Rees to the extent that it stands as artistic potential for the exhibition *Things I Did When I Was A Young Man. Swan's Way or Whale's Road* (2007), a work conceived specifically for the exhibition, perhaps most outwardly exemplifies this very idea and stands as testament to the sheer diversity with which he

approaches his work. The outcome of a voyage undertaken by Rees, this piece involved the artist travelling from the coast of Swansea by boat until some two mile distance from the shore was reached, enabling himself to take in Swansea in its entirety. Resting in this position – or perhaps attempting to do so – Rees filmed toward the direction of his departure, capturing the city panoramically. In doing so he not only cleverly formulates a mirroring of his nostalgia for Swansea – a process of looking back – as well as drawing a parallel to his current geographical truncation from the city, but also undeniably engenders a poetic almost romantic depiction of the city of Swansea. Rees' desire to distil memories of his youth also resides within the means of its presentation: an 8mm film projection. While one might assume this particular display method – given its archaic status and being on the edge of extinction – to be merely a substitute for more forerunning technology it is in fact a decision made intentionally by the artist and a manoeuvre that further stimulates a sense of nostalgia for his place of birth. As the artist describes ›When I imagine Swansea I almost see it through an old film projection‹. Despite scouring the city several times, Rees struggled to find the required projector for the piece, luckily however, the gallery found one later on in a charity shop. Perhaps this might be reflected upon as an indication of Swansea's minimal artistic facilities, it could equally indicate a city that on closer inspection reveals hidden treasures. This seems to be the case as Rees later discovered a Swansea-based 8mm enthusiast completely by chance who kindly agreed to loan a projector for the purpose of the show and even assisted with the shoot, joining the artist on his voyage out to sea. Episodes such as these are as much a part of the work as what is presented within the exhibition