

EDITORIAL

Word and eye

This special issue of *PW* explores a range of encounters between the visual and verbal, grouped around two themes. Firstly, there is the relationship of poetry to painting, sculpture, photography and film. How can processes of making in words and images be compared? Although the device of ekphrasis, in which one artform comments on another, is ancient, in what new ways can the poem respond to a work of visual art? Secondly, one might look at the visual qualities of the poem itself: all language takes on a physical shape, whether on the page or in the mouth, and the emphasis here might be on what happens when we start to look *at* the poem, rather than through it.

These questions are especially relevant in a Welsh context. In a small country it is possible to think more expansively and to discover greater critical mass by looking beyond the limits of one artform, but there are further reasons why the visual materiality of poetry should be of interest here. As Iwan Bala points out in his essay, mixing text and image disturbs the notion of art or poetry as a window on the world. It's always worth looking critically at what such windows offer us, since transparency is rarely as neutral as it appears: clarity and focus are, by and large, achieved through omission, but who chooses what to leave out? In a minority culture, any view of the world takes on a particular character as it is refracted through the complex interplay of language and history, sometimes obscured, sometimes picking up unexpected glints from elsewhere.

Several contributors write from a practitioner's point of view: Elin ap Hywel reflects on a cross-artform collaboration in which the image reveals and negotiates the ambiguous ground between languages. Pascale Petit's essay compares her use of metaphor in sculpture and poetry, and describes her serial approach to the composition of poems, a technique that is more familiar in visual art than mainstream anglophone poetics. For Angela Gardner, another poet with a background in visual art, attention to the surface and texture of words becomes a means of re-engaging poetry with the body in a media-saturated culture. For each of these writers, what emerges is a process in which visual and verbal languages dynamically interact, each changed by the other.

In many ways, this issue expands on *PW*'s longstanding interest in translation, as transposition between artforms involves the same tensions between what is carried over, what is left behind, and what is created anew in the encounter between different signifying systems. In concrete poetry, visual and verbal interpretations can oscillate in the same text, disturbing and enriching each other. While Matthew Jarvis takes a historical perspective on this area, the new work featured here suggests that its possibilities, if increasingly integrated into other forms rather than pursued for their own sake, remain open. Most of the poems in this issue were sent in response to a call on the theme of the visual; some of this work will spill over into future issues, reflecting a continuing interest in how the word and the eye intersect.