***Invitation to Artists***

***Aberystwyth Printmakers***

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**Ar lan y Mor: On the Seashore**

**A new art-science collaborative project**

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This project is novel collaboration of art, humanities and science in the coastal zone of mid-Wales, facilitated by a new interdisciplinary partnership between Aberystwyth Printmakers (AP), the Institute of Biological, Environmental and Rural Sciences (IBERS) Aberystwyth University, the University of Wales Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies, and the University of Lincoln.

By sharing knowledge of our local coastal habitat, including the growing effects of sea-level rise, and the impact of extreme weather events and storms on ecosystems and communities, a series of events, talks and walks will inspire printmakers and the local community to produce prints on the theme of the seashore. This will highlight themes related to past, present, and future human interaction with coastal systems (biological, cultural, and physical) using the lens of current climate and environment crises as well as planetary health. We hope to foster local interest in the use of natural resources from the seashore, and the need to protect them in mid-Wales.

All AP members are invited to participate in this project and to submit work for a number of exhibitions planned for 2026 and 2027. In order to facilitate art-science dialogs and enable AP members to co-produce ideas and images for the exhibitions, we have commissioned extended soundbites on the theme of ‘On the Seashore’ from three local and well-known academics (Dr Jessica Adams, Senior Research Scientist, IBERS; Professor Mary-Ann Constantine, University of Wales Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies; Professor Mark Macklin, University of Lincoln). These (see below) present three interweaving spatial and temporal strands, which we hope will provide a starting point and inspiration for print works.

**Seaweed**: Jessica Adams

Going down to the beach, there are always new things to see and to look at. My job allows me to look at seaweeds and see if we can break them down or extract chemicals from them to the benefit of people, animals, plants, and the soil. But working with dried milled pieces of seaweed is no replacement for the naturally-growing varieties that cover our shores.

Seaweeds are put into three general groups, based on the colours they are: brown, red, and green. Each group is as or more different from the others than all the variation in land plants put together, meaning they are not only made of different molecules compared to land plants, but they are only grouped together due to the habitat they live in. Unlike land plants, seaweeds do not need to put lots of energy into making compounds like lignin, providing strength and the ability to fight gravity. Instead, they contain jellies with names like alginate, carrageenan, agar-agar, ulvan, perfect for coping with the continuous wave movements and abrasions. Many also contain air bladders, helping them to float their fronds up towards the light. Seaweeds have amazing coping methods, with the intertidal wracks (with common names like bladder, saw or egg wrack) being both submerged in cold water and dried out on rocks in the sun within a day, every day. They can survive storms, continuous rain, changes in the salinity of the water and snails, finishing the onslaught with their almost luminescent colours of light green-yellow or olive-grey-gold hues still retained. Yet harvest them and the colour fades within hours, replaced by rapid, odorous deterioration or dry, dull sticklike pieces; shadows of what they were. Seaweeds are so different to that of land-plants, often behaving the reverse of that anticipated if processing them and requiring considerations not needed for land-plants. Despite being so different between their groups, they are all a joy to work with. So, when I am down at the shore, I often think of EE Cumming’s last line: ‘for whatever you lose (like a you or a me)/ it’s always ourselves we find in the sea.’

**Curious Travellers at the Coast**: Mary-Ann Constantine

‘The beach at Aberystwyth is covered with loose stones; the cliffs are bold, black rocks. Bad as this beach is, we are constantly upon it. Betty, the old sea guide, says we ‘walk out of all raison’; but my poor mother is walking for her life. I am careless and happy; I sing to the waves; and twice I have danced at a ball at the Talbot’. Catherine Hutton (1787).

We travel to the sea. That moment of seeing it – through the streaked windows of a train, from a car, cresting a hill on foot – is always significant, sometimes more, sometimes less, depending on our age, our occupations, our distance from it in our normal lives, the light, the wind, our own private thoughts and energies. It’s never the same twice. Reading through accounts of visitors to the Welsh coast in the 18th and early 19th centuries, it’s hard not be struck by that same paradox of sameness and difference. Repeated journeys and actions, a repeated vocabulary to describe the views – we’re in at the birth of all the clichés and stereotypes that feed the tourist industry today. Yet there is often a distinctive voice, a quirk, a phrase, an observation – a little chink of light into history. I like to think of Catherine Hutton singing to the sea; I wonder how her ailing mother managed those stones; and I want to know what Betty, whose job depended on tourists, made of them both. Some came for health reasons, or to live cheaply for a while; others were just curious. The artist William Daniell and writer Richard Ayton arrived rather dramatically from the sea in 1813, their boatmen picking out a precarious route between a ‘vast projection of slate rock, black and craggy and girded all round by detached fragments’. The whole scene, write Ayton ‘was exceedingly wild and strange […] The dim and uncertain light in which every object was seen threw around it a kind of mystery which gave play to the imagination: all the forms of the coast appeared new and inexplicable.’ Next day they visited a large wreck at Tan-y-Bwlch, and found other, less fortunate, arrivals from the sea – a crew of Portuguese sailors huddled in a smoky hut. The boat had been carrying a cargo of cotton from plantations worked by enslaved people in Brazil: coastal tourism, then as now, tangles with a darker web of connections and displacements across the sea. And (of course) there’s a war on: in the 1790s the Welsh coast was jittery with anxieties about a French invasion. There was a failed landing at Fishguard in 1797 and the following year, tourists jostled for lodgings with soldiers and refugees in the port towns linking Wales to a turbulent Ireland. Curiosity takes many forms. Some of the sharpest images are captured by those exploring the coast for rocks, shells, seaweed, and creatures. The naturalist Thomas Pennant, walking the sands near Cricieth, lists a terrible ‘Wreck of Birds’ washed ashore after a storm. Combing the beach at Holyhead in 1754, he noted an anemone ‘displaying various beautyfull branches, always expanded: ‘it readily seized on any bit of fish offered it and made use of those branches to convey it to its mouth; these branches seemed furnished with small nervous papillae which adhered strongly to my finger. I love that moment of exploratory touch, on both sides. Nearly three centuries later, it is hard not to feel we have broken some kind of promise.

**The Long View**: Mark Macklin

In our current existential climate crisis, the seashore is portrayed as a zone of conflict between society and the rising sea with ever more frequent catastrophic storms and surges. Notions and straplines of ‘hold the line,’ ‘soft defence’ and ‘managed retreat’ conjure up images of battlelines and war. From a deep-time perspective, what is entirely forgotten is that the position of the coastline has never been static, and the concrete and stone infrastructure that was built to ‘defend’ coastal communities in Wales and more widely, is a modern phenomenon dating from the Industrial Revolution. At the time of the earliest re-peopling of Cardigan Bay and Mid-Wales after the last Ice Age c. 12,500 years ago, sea level was more than 25 metres lower than at the present day and the shoreline was 20 kilometres west of Aberystwyth, running in a broad arc from Bardsey Island in the north to Cardigan in the south. A series of now submerged tidally-influenced rivers flowed across a low relief coastal plain, and these were the preferred habitats and ecological niches of Mesolithic hunting and gathering people who followed a sustainable lifeway in these productive coastal margin environments. A period of sustained and rapid sea-level rise that began c. 10,000 years ago that continued until the adoption of farming c. 6,000 years ago when the sea reached the present coastline, resulted in the disappearance of this terrain that had underpinned human livelihoods for more than 5,000 years. The difference between then and now is that people could move, populations were tiny, and they practiced transhumance shifting between the coast and Welsh uplands tracking fish, animals, and birds with the changing seasons. As we approach the end of the first quarter of the 21st Century, sea-level is now rising at a rate exceeding that witnessed by our hunter-gather ancestors. The loss of this long forgotten watery realm may have prompted (forced?) people to adopt farming. This was a revolutionary step that has transformed our planet, fostered ‘civilization’ but has also led to the demographic, environmental and planetary crises that we face today. The challenge is how to re-configure human lifeways at the coastal margin, including protecting food and water security, and developing resilience as both individuals and communities. The coastal peoples of Mid-Wales who live on the seashore offer a lens through which to explore these multi-faceted and multi-scalar issues. The creative and artistic communities can play a pivotal role in helping shape and co-produce the choices and hard decisions that will need to be made if society is going to avoid an environmental cul-de-sac, ultra fragmentation, and hyper inequality.

**Exhibitions**

We have confirmed exhibition bookings at Aberystwyth Arts Centre, December to January 2026 to coincide with the British Phycological Society meeting being organised by Dr Jessica Adams (IBERS), which will be held at Aberystwyth 6-8th January 2026. We also will be exhibiting at Oriel Mon, Ynys Mon, 10th July – 5th September 2027. We are working to tour this show nationally and internationally.

**Conditions for Entry**

Two-part submission process:

**Stage 1 - Deadline January 31st, 2025**

Registering on AP website “shop” <https://www.aberystwythprintmakers.org.uk/category/all-products> where you pay your £20 entry fee.

A maximum of 3 prints can be submitted by each artist.

**First print** must be on an A4 piece of seaweed paper (hand produced and will be provided to artists by Viv Mullet and Stuart Evans). These prints will be submitted unframed and used to fill our collection of A4 oak frames.

**Second and third prints** have no restrictions on size but must be mounted in high quality frames and can be of any method, printed by the artist’s own hand.

**Stage 2 - Deadline September 1st, 2025**

Delivery of work to AP Workshop with labels attached.

Stuart Evans and Judy Macklin: ‘Ar lan y Mor: On the Seashore’ project leaders.

19th December 2024