

It is Iwan Bala whose highly sophisticated visual idiom, deliberately developed to enable a cartographical rendering of a people's cultural identity, is perhaps best suited to capture this seminal aspect of the (R.S. Thomas) poetry. Bala has always been interested in what might be termed the 'symbolic geography' of such identity, including the plethora of visual signifiers of which it is partly composed, and he resembles the early R.S. Thomas in particular in his dedication to what he has termed a 'custodial aesthetics' – the creation of images dedicated to the maintenance of an historically informed national consciousness. Rather, however, than adopt what might be termed traditional, Romantic means of promoting cultural awareness, Bala often employs eclectic post-colonial and postmodernist methods, suffused with playfully skeptical humour, to dismantle barren and inappropriate national stereotypes.

Iwan Bala's interest in dismantling the gallery of images that have long been instrumental in perpetuating his nation's cultural subordination derives, of course, from his alertness to modern Wales's 'post colonial' condition. And he has been guided in his search for an alternative visual vocabulary, expressive of his country's true, authentic distinctiveness, by the work of artists from such other post-colonial nations as Cuba, Zimbabwe, the Basque Country and Ireland. His participation during the 1980's in the agit-prop activities of the group of Welsh artists that constituted Beca was consistent with an admiration for the radically deconstructive work of another influential Welsh artist of that period, the militant Europhile Ivor Davies, whose commitment to the calculated derangements of a liberal Surrealism found literally explosive expression in his practice of a 'Destruction in Art'.

Extract from 'The brush's piety' chapter 12 from R.S. Thomas. *Serial Obsessive* by M. Wynn Thomas