

## **PRESS RELEASE 13.12.10**

### **Winter exhibition at Spike Island**

## ***Maelfa***

## **Sean Edwards**

**Preview: Friday 21 January, 6-9pm**

**Exhibition runs: Saturday 22 January – Sunday 10 April 2011**

**Gallery opening hours: Tuesday – Sunday 11am-5pm**

Spike Island presents a new exhibition by emerging Welsh artist Sean Edwards, his first major solo show in a public gallery. Edwards is interested in the poetics of failure, regret and disappointment, and his practice investigates such matters through the materiality of everyday objects. With *Maelfa* he extends his focus to an entire building and lived system, focusing on its disappearing communities and faded utopian aspirations.

Built around a block of high-rise flats on a council estate in 1973, the Maelfa (from the Welsh word for 'market') Shopping Centre in the Cardiff suburb of Llanedeyrn was intended to provide a thriving focal point for the community. A classic municipal build of its period, the centre's potential as a new, localised system of living was compromised by institutionalised cost-cutting that undermined the original modernist architectural principles of flow, space and light. Mean proportions, poor construction and an air of desolation led to Maelfa's steady decline over subsequent decades. Edwards undertook a residency in the centre in 2009 ahead of its scheduled demolition, making photographic and filmed studies of the building and interacting with the people who use it. The resulting work is contemplative and reflective, nostalgic rather than critical: Edwards grew up in Llanedeyrn, using the centre and its library on an almost daily basis, and his father still lives in the neighbouring tower block.

The centrepiece of the exhibition is a slow-paced, high-definition video, also entitled *Maelfa*, in which the camera glides smoothly and silently through the building's interior surfaces, creating a dream-like portrait of the space. No exterior shots are ever shown, but with one sweeping movement the camera pans across glass and corridors for 22 minutes, a style familiar to us from haunted house movies and science fiction films and as first seen in Max Ophuls's works from the late 1940s. In directing the camera towards the glass windows, the artist creates an extreme close-up which allows the viewer to witness three planes simultaneously: the focus slowly shifts between the shopfront's display and the shelved objects deeper within the store, all the while allowing moments of activity in the shopping centre to reflect into view.

The video is accompanied by an installation of photographs, prints, 16mm films and a large hanging sculpture. These elements will be shown alongside documentary ephemera relating to the project which includes architectural plans of the Maelfa centre pinned up in a specially-designed reading area. Taken as a whole, *Maelfa* can be read as an anthropological investigation of both a specific place and of the broader project of state-sponsored modernism.

# Spike Island

## Notes to editors:

- Sean Edwards (1980) is an Abergavenny-based artist who has exhibited extensively nationally and internationally. Recent solo shows include Outpost, Norwich (2010), Limoncello, London and Tanya Leighton, Berlin (both 2009). Recent group shows include Lisson Gallery London, and Wallspace, New York. Edwards graduated with an MA from the Slade School of Art in 2005, and currently lectures at Cardiff School of Art and Design and runs the Welsh Artist Resource Programme at g39 in Cardiff. He has recently been the recipient of a Creative Wales Award 2010/11.
- The exhibition is accompanied with an artist's book *no dust adheres*, published by The Bedford Press, London and Safle, Cardiff. It includes a text by Sam Jacob about the architectural history of the Maelfa Shopping Centre.
- A series of talks and events, including by Lynsey Hanley, author of *Estates: An Intimate History*, and Owen Hatherley, author of *Militant Modernism* and *A Guide to the New Ruins of Great Britain*, will contextualise the exhibition and provide time and space for further reflection and discussion. Please see [www.spikeisland.org.uk](http://www.spikeisland.org.uk) for more information.
- Spike Island is a place of production and exhibition of contemporary art and design situated on the southern end of Bristol's historic docks. Originally emerging from independent and artist-led culture, related concerns remain close to the organisation's values and priorities.

Within the 80,000 square foot building, Spike Island offers visitors a year-round programme of free exhibitions, events and family activities in the stunning central gallery spaces, as well as providing artists' studios and various services and office space for both new and established designers and commercial creative businesses.

**For press information and high-resolution images please contact Anna Searle, Marketing Manager: [anna.searle@spikeisland.org.uk](mailto:anna.searle@spikeisland.org.uk) or +44 (0)117 929 2266.**



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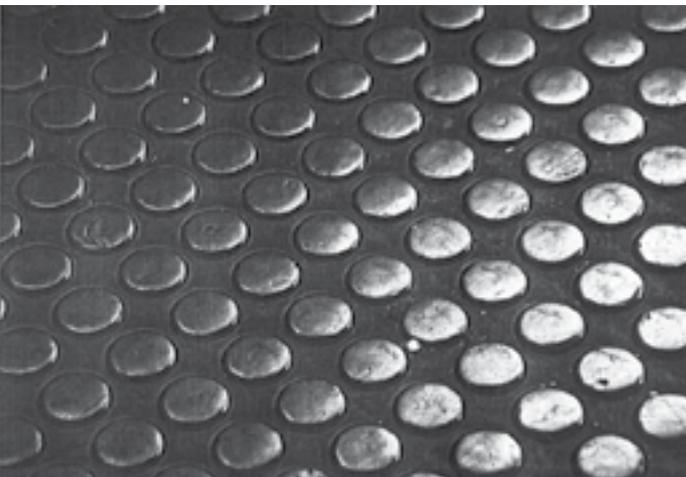
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Sean Edwards, still from *Maelfa*,  
HD video, 22mins, 2010.



Sean Edwards, untitled painting,  
2010.



Sean Edwards, untitled giclee  
print, 2010.