

## WWII tragedy of Lidice remembered in Ffotogallery exhibition

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Artists and academics at Ffotogallery in Wales have put together a thoughtful exhibition that responds to a classic wartime film which served as an evocation of Welsh life and a memorial to an infamous and brutal Nazi atrocity.

The *Silent Village* was made by the poet, artist and film maker Humphrey Jennings for the Ministry of Information in response to the Nazi obliteration of the Czech village of Lidice following the assassination of SS General Reinhardt Heydrich by members of the Czech resistance.

On June 10 1942 German soldiers descended on the unsuspecting mining village 20 kilometres north of Prague, sealed it off and murdered 192 men. Women and children were separated from each other and carted off to concentration camps. Most of the children were eventually gassed at the Chelmino extermination camp and only 17 of the women returned after the war.

The Nazis finished their work by burning and bulldozing the remains of the village.

Throughout the West, news of the atrocity was met with outrage. But it inspired various acts of commemoration including poems, novels, symphonies and films that sought to come to terms with the total destruction of a village and to try to understand and remember the horror of what took place.

Jennings, under the auspices of the Crown Film Unit, chose the Welsh mining village of Cwmgiedd in the Swansea Valley as the setting for a filmed reconstruction. Having discussed the project in nearby Ystradgynlais just two months after the killings, he gained the co-operation of local pitmen, South Wales Miners' Federation president Arthur Horner, and miners' agent Dai Dan Evans.

No actors were involved, instead the villagers performed in the atmospheric film.

As well as showing *The Silent Village*, project curator Russell Roberts of the University of Wales invited artists Paolo Ventura and Peter Finnemore, the writer Rachel Trezise and the late film historian David Berry to respond to a film that is both a reconstruction of the Lidice atrocity and an account of Welsh life in the early 1940s.

Peter Finnemore, who represented Wales in the Venice Biennial in 2005, produced photographic and video work after studying Jennings' moving docudrama. His father was taken ill and died of cancer during the process of making the work. The result is a highly personal narrative that serves as a memorial to his dad as well as an insight into the incident in Lidice.



*Paolo Ventura has produced a series of black and white stills using tableaux recreations of atrocities. © Paolo Ventura*

Novelist Rachel Trezise wrote a novella about a German émigré married to a Welshman who discovers things about her past and her family's relationship to the atrocity in Lidice. Visitors can listen to this moving story on listening posts in the Gallery.

Paolo Ventura is the most remote artist in that he didn't come to Wales but responded directly to the film. He used action figures to restage the kind of photographs that Nazi SS concentration camp guards would take off duty.

The photos have been distressed and aged and he has added a fiction about finding them in an envelope. He has also sourced some images of atrocities committed by the Nazis and restaged and photographed them as a series of disturbing tableaux.

"This is a very ambitious project - there are a lot of dimensions to this exhibition," says Ffotogallery Director David Drake. "Some people are interested in the Humphrey Jennings film, hopefully they will also look at the contemporary responses. Others are more interested in the broader issues of how you represent and memorialise atrocities like this."

The exhibition - a two-year commission for the Gallery - includes a three-volume publication launching on February 10 comprising a main catalogue, a Peter Finnemore book and the Rachel Trezise novella.