

## McLUCAS, CLIFFORD (1945-2002), artist and theatre director

**Name:** Clifford Mclucas  
**Date of birth:** 1945  
**Date of death:** 2002  
**Spouse:** Karen Chambers  
**Child:** John Mclucas  
**Child:** Joseph Mclucas  
**Child:** Jesse Mclucas  
**Parent:** Marion Mclucas (née Wilford)  
**Parent:** James Mclucas  
**Gender:** Male  
**Occupation:** artist and theatre director  
**Area of activity:** Art and Architecture; Performing Arts  
**Author:** Rowan O'Neill

Cliff Mclucas was born to a working class family in Wetherby, Yorkshire on 29 May 1945. His father James Mclucas was Scottish and his mother Marion (née Wilford) was English. After attending Pudsey Grammar school he went to Manchester University in 1963 to study architecture but did not finish the course. After time spent travelling in Europe he moved to Edinburgh with his partner Karen Chambers in 1968 and continued to work on architectural projects. Between 1972-74 he worked intermittently as a forester apprenticing himself to a master carpenter and became a skilled and inventive craftsman.

In 1974 he moved to Tre-groes, Ceredigion with his partner and young family. They had three sons, Jesse, Joseph and John. He worked as a carpenter on self-employed projects and began to learn Welsh encouraged and tutored by local primary school teacher Emyr Hywel. He became part of a group of theatre makers centered around the home of Mary Lloyd Jones at Aberbanc, putting on plays such as Liz Whittaker's *The White Tower*. He also began to investigate the performative aspects of the structures he was making at places like Pigeonsford in Llangrannog. This interest led him to seek collaborations with other artists working similarly in the Aberystwyth area.

In the early 80s his relationship with Chambers ended and he moved to Aberystwyth. Whilst pursuing his own art practice of printing and collage he found work as the Director of the Barn Centre, a community arts initiative that consisted of studio spaces. The centre hosted groups such as the Aberystwyth Media Group (of which Mclucas was also a member) and Dawns Dyfed and their associated workshops and events. It was during this period that he became connected with the Welsh language theatre company Brith Gof who also had studio/office space in the building.

Mclucas's early collaborations with Brith Gof included the design and creation of wooden benches to be used in their touring performances, and a series of large fabric illustrations illustrating the books of the Old Testament to be used as backdrops in a promenade performance at Llanrhaeadr-ym-Mochnant celebrating the 400th anniversary of the translation of the bible into Welsh in 1988. Mclucas' contribution Baneri'r Beibl subsequently visited the cathedrals of Wales in a touring exhibition. In 1987 he contributed a similar set of banners for the performance *Y Gadair Ddu*, part of a series of works inspired by Goya's Disasters of war etchings.

As a result of these collaborations Mclucas was offered a full-time role with the company as joint artistic director in 1988. At this point Brith Gof embarked on a series of large-scale site-specific works, a notable feature of which were Mclucas's epic architectural scenographic designs in post-industrial locations. These included *Gododdin*, originally devised for the old Rover factory in Cardiff which went on to tour other large-scalesites in Europe, and the performance *Pax* originally conceived for Llandaff cathedral but ultimately realized most memorably at Aberystwyth railway station. During this time Mclucas also developed his idea of 'the host the ghost and the witness' as a means of describing his theatre and design practice in relation to site, which subsequently became an influential concept in the field of theatre studies.

In 1994 Mclucas moved to Cardiff in order to become more engaged with the production aspects of the company which now had offices at Chapter Arts Centre. In 1995 his pioneering work for television was screened on both S4C and ITV Wales. The bilingual production, *Y Pen Bas Y Pen Dwfn* was shot in a swimming pool and depicted the drowning of Capel Celyn. This was juxtaposed with a retelling of Daniel Defoe's novel *Robinson Crusoe*, much of the action presented as a split-screen narrative with filming above and below water. The company returned to West Wales in 1995 to work on a site-specific theatre production, *Tri Bywyd*. Taking as its location an abandoned farm in the middle of a forestry plantation near Llanfair Clydogau, the performance marked the beginning of an on-going collaboration with the archaeology department at Lampeter University and a reassertion of the Welsh language identity of the company.

In 1998 it was announced that Brith Gof would no longer be revenue funded by the Arts Council of Wales. Mike Pearson had left the company shortly before, but Mclucas sought to continue their work by relocating the company from Cardiff to the university at Lampeter and embarking on a series of works with the over-arching title *Project X*. This was envisaged as a series of 12 works, although only six were ever produced. The works increasingly showcased the creative talent of artist and performer Eddie Ladd (who had also played the role of *Sarah Jacob* in *Tri Bywyd*) and the experimental use of close circuit television and surveillance technologies in order to mediate live work in intriguing and provocative ways.

In 1999 Mclucas moved to Lampeter and was appointed to the honorary post of Research Fellow at the university. The final Brith Gof production *Draw Draw yn...* was performed at Theatr Felinfach and marked a transition from Mclucas's role as a theatre director to that of a 'deep map maker' drawing upon ideas first encountered whilst working on *Tri Bywyd*. In 2000 Mclucas took up the post of visiting research fellow at Stanford University, California to work on the *Three Landscapes Project* with his Lampeter colleague the archaeologist Professor Michael Shanks. This project focused on the concept of the 'deep map' after William Least Heat-Moon's *PrairyErth* and sought to find ways to represent the richness of landscape geographically and culturally using new digital technologies.

Mclucas embarked on an intensive period of solo research, and also continued to seek opportunities to present the work of Brith Gof such as *Eerste Dagen/The first day*, a mapping installation developed for the Oerol theatre festival in a disused bunker on the island of Terschelling. Returning to Wales from Stanford in 2002, he began work on *Prosiect Ogam: Rhwng ei dau fôn* - a deep map of the Pembrokeshire Coastal Path. A study for this project, *Bro*, was presented in the art tent at the National Eisteddfod in St Davids in August of that year. However, the work remained unfinished due to Mclucas's untimely death of a brain tumor on 1 September 2002.

Mclucas's archive is housed in the National Library of Wales alongside that of Brith Gof which he maintained throughout the years of his involvement with the company. Mclucas's practice represents an engagement with a particular place, Ceredigion, during a period of rapid social change and presents a unique understanding of that process through his creative response as an incomer to Wales and a Welsh language learner. His influence can be felt on a generation of artists working in Wales to this day, and through his deep mapping manifesto his work has a gathering significance internationally.

### Author

Rowan O'Neill

### Sources

Information from his colleague, Margaret Ames, Trefenter

Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, [Cliff Mclucas](#) and [Brith Gof Collections](#)

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