

MidlandsArts andCultureMagazine

A REVIEW OF THE ARTS IN LAOIS, LONGFORD, OFFALY AND WESTMEATH **SPRING 2014**

ISSUE

21

THE WRITTEN WORD
MUSIC & DANCE
THEATRE & FILM
VISUAL ARTS

FREE

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Helps Offaly Celebrate

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Bacon & Lucien Freud
who lived in Roundwood
House

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Public Art Projects

24/25 Nick Miller –
Portrait of an Artist and
his forthcoming visit to
the Laois Arthouse

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Smart Bomb Tour



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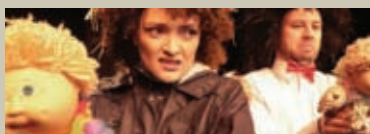
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A Word from the Editor

Oscar Wilde, in his 1889 essay *The Decay of Lying* said that, "Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life".

That may be true but in this edition of Midlands Arts and Culture magazine is fair to say that there is a lot of art imitating life.

We have artists such as Eoin MacLochlainn, Kate Heffernan and Maisie Lee expressing their differing idea of home and what home is.

And in an extension of home, or home and environment influencing art, which in turn mimics life is the work of Veronica Nicholson. In this issue she talks about being an artist on a farm and how she seeks out its relevance to her practice through international online rural art dialogues.

Then there are those such as Kate Heffernan using her own experience of hitting the big 3-0 in her in her comic production *In Dog Years I'm Dead*; she considers her life and what these passing and future decades offer and how they should be viewed. Art, very definitely imitating life or at least exploring life and using the feelings life brings to the surface to form ideas and shape writing.

Jean O'Brien's poem penned in memory of Seamus Heaney is very much shaped by life experiences of knowing and sharing moments with the former Bellaghy poet making use of some of his own poetic language and turns of phrase about a life that was his.

And there's MÓR – where a number of Midland musicians from different musical backgrounds have come together to form Public Access Arts' historic collaborative house band. The band aims to develop how original music is made, performed and brings art to life by pulling down barriers and performing amongst the world – art and life intertwining, becoming one.

Others are trying to visualize what life will be like in one Per Cent for Art project for a school from Olive Cuskelly "When I grown up I want to be..."

This is a simple, yet intriguing concept of how children view themselves in a future world and also goes a long way to revealing what they have also absorbed. Every one of the 187 pupils was involved making the scheme truly inclusive – and perhaps one worthy of a follow-up survey as to the most common professions chosen by those involved!

So while Wilde said that "Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life" I feel that without life's experiences and the emotions its conjures up there would be less art – or less good art. Whether conscious or subconscious life influences what we see and how we see things and how we express things and ultimately in many, many cases the art that is born from it.

And, As far as the Midlands goes there is plenty of Art imitating Life!

Angela Madden, Editor

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Longford welcomes public art projects

by Aoife Carberry

2014 is already shaping up to be an exciting year for art in county Longford, with three huge projects in the pipeline.

The first of the public art pieces is set to be installed this month.

Longford County Council's Public Art Committee commissioned a sculpture for the new N5 bypass, and submissions were made by artists throughout the country and abroad for the project.

In the end, it was Cork artist Alex Pentek who impressed the committee, with a sculpture of a violin, designed to look as though it is embedded in the ground. The piece, which is being fabricated and assembled in the National Sculpture Factory in Cork is a nod to the rich musical heritage of the county.

The second of the public art projects is due to be completed this summer.

This sculpture has been commissioned for the junction of St Michael's Road and the

Strokestown Road. The brief for the piece received a lot of interest and the adjudication committee was deadlocked in their deliberations so re-evaluated two short-listed artists, before deciding on the piece.

The winning proposal was from the creative partnership of two Dublin brothers Joe and Pat Walker. The Walker Brothers proposal in highly abstract and conceptual in that it will be a casting in stainless steel of the negative space between the letter "l" and "f" in the conjunction "If".

The artists are fascinated by the often unnoticed abstract spaces between letters and the significance of the conjunction "If" is that it opens up the sense of possibility for the entire community of this regenerated urban area.

Last, but certainly not least, the largest of the three projects will see sculptures erected in eight villages throughout the county.

The areas were carefully selected by an adjudication committee, who chose the villages that hadn't benefited recently from public art.

In the end, Ballymahon, Kenagh, Ardagh, Abbeylara, Granard, Newtownforbes, Drumlish and Aghnaclyffe were chosen for the project.

The committee is expecting a good response to the brief, which is seeking an artist to create eight unique pieces, each with a common thematic or design feature.

When all eight pieces are created and installed, they will form a county-wide sculpture trail and it is hoped that a tourism trail can then be established around the artwork.

M

Details of this commission are available at www.longfordcoco.ie/arts_office.html and www.visuallongford.ie

Chatroom showcases at Dunamais

Laois Youth Theatre presents *Chatroom* at the Dunamais Arts Centre on Saturday, April 12 at 3pm.

Featuring the Portlaoise and Stradbally groups, along with members from Kildare Youth Theatre, *Chatroom*, by Enda Walsh, features six teenagers who communicate in Internet chatrooms.

Their conversations range in subject from Willy Wonka to Britney Spears to JK Rowling to – suicide.

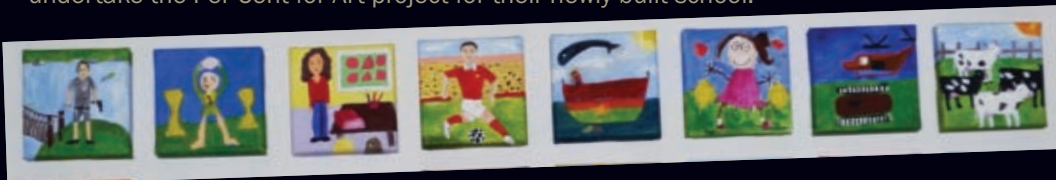
Jim is depressed and talks of ending his life. He ventures into cyberspace seeking advice and soon encounters a faceless twosome who do their utmost to convince him to make good his escape... M

This play is only suitable for people aged 13 and over.

Tickets are available from the Box Office Dunamais Arts Centre on 057 8663355 or online at www.dunamais.ie and cost €8 for adults and €5 for Youth Theatre members and students.

When I grow up I want to be... A Writer!

Scoil Sheosaimh Naofa, Ballinagar, recently commissioned visual artist Olive Cuskelly to undertake the Per Cent for Art project for their newly built school.



Cuskelly's winning proposal 'When I grow up I want to be...' was to create a collection of paintings inspired by children's imagination and aspirations.

She began the project in January 2013 by holding workshops to engage all 187 pupils as she felt this was an important first step giving the children the opportunity to understand how art is made.

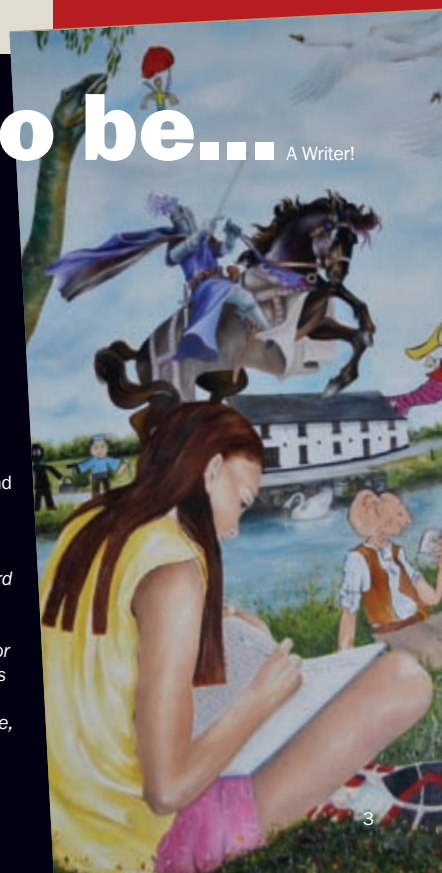
Following the workshops, 48 canvas pieces created by the children depicting their ambitions when they grow up was mounted and framed together to produce a large vibrant piece for the entrance foyer of the new school.

Cuskelly then completed a series of large oil on canvas paintings inspired by the children themselves, incorporating her own style of painting together with that of the children's artwork. Where possible she depicted familiar local scenes as backdrops to help the children appreciate and respect their immediate and wider environment. Denis O'Connor, the School Principal, says: "All the paintings are beautiful in their own right; vivid, bright, imaginative and painted by an artist who is obviously very talented and creative."

Cuskelly has worked as a professional artist both at home and abroad and has exhibited

widely with her work held in many private and public collections. Her work is inspired by her natural surroundings and in the power and energy of the human figure.

Principal O'Connor concludes: "The Board of Management wish to thank Olive for undertaking and completing the project, The Department of Education and Skills for its foresight in ensuring that such schemes are provided for in new public building projects, Offaly County Council Arts Office, for advice and guidance and The Board of Management's Committee that was established to initiate and oversee the project." M



Tullamore Author Pens BEST SELLER



Fiona O'Malley's novella *Goodbye Mrs Robinson*, a black Irish comedy, was on the Amazon British and Irish crime, thriller & mystery ebook top 10 list on Christmas Day 2013, sitting comfortably alongside JK Rowling's *The Cuckoo's Calling*.

The 25 year old who is now based in London and who grew up in Tullamore says: "I am absolutely overwhelmed by the fact that it was a Christmas bestseller. Even though we're in the same category I wouldn't compare my work to JK Rowling's. That's like comparing Tesco value wine to Moët!"

Not wanting to be pigeonholed, Fiona is also the writer of the highly regarded *What Would Kate Do? The Diary of a Walking Disaster* and *The Daily Fail: the Musical*. She has almost finished the second in the trilogy of the *What Would Kate Do* books, entitled *What*

Would Kate Do 2? The Diary of a Human Train Wreck and is also writing a second musical with Joseph Alexander called *Grim*, with both to be launched in 2014.

Her biography is impressive; she is a writer, producer, journalist, columnist, poet, co-founder of The Untold Theatre Company and a contributor to *Vogue*, the *Sunday Times*, the *Irish Times* and the *Observer*. "I applied for *Vogue* 106 times before I got it which means I was rejected 105 times. There are only two things getting in the way of success – hard work and rejection, so I put the hard work in and rejected rejection. Pain is temporary. Rejection is temporary. If you give up, it's forever."

She adds: "It's flattering when people say, 'you've done so much at such a young age' but I also think that's an ageist attitude. Why should I wait until I'm older to succeed or fail? That's wasting time. I hate waste."

She moved to Tullamore from Dublin with her Mother and her brother in 1995 when she was six years old.

"Some of the people who were the biggest influences on my development as a writer are in Tullamore, like my wonderful English teachers, Pauline McKenna and Jacinta Gallagher during my time at the Sacred Heart."

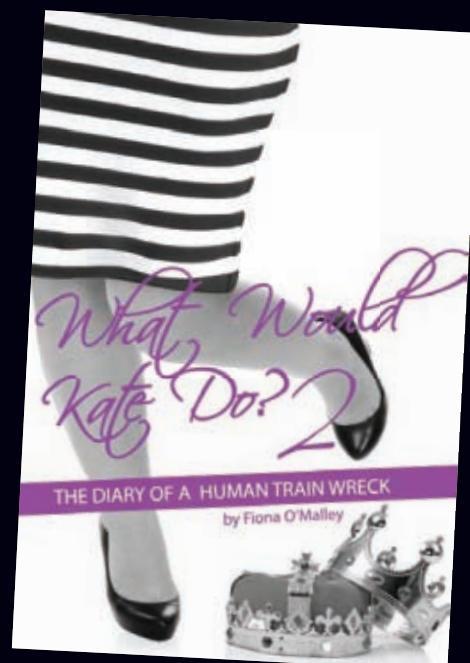
Fiona's credits her mother with giving her the tools to find inspiration to write. "My mother told me the best

way for someone to better their mind is through education so I pursued mine for as long as it held my interest. She told me the best way for me to broaden my mind was through travel. So I travelled as often as I had the opportunity. She told me to soak up as much information as I could from everything around me so I learned from the learned and the uneducated, the positive and the negative, the wise and the innocent."

Goodbye Mrs Robinson she acknowledges is the riskiest thing she has ever written, written in similar risqué politically incorrect humour as the films *The Guard* or *In Bruges*, both works of the Galway McDonagh brothers who she admires.

Meanwhile, Fiona is enjoying the opportunities that life in London brings. Moving there three years ago to pursue her MA in journalism and more writing opportunities, she says, "I love the go-go-go mentality."

There she has teamed up with theatre director, Adam Wollerton and together they cooked up a plan to submit to the International Youth Arts Festival, find a composer (they ended up with the very gifted Joseph Alexander), a cast, rehearsal space, set, props, costume, mics and lighting, all within a few months. It



paid off and they were offered a slot in a theatre off London's West End for a week.

"We had two months to put it on and make it a better show. We got four-star reviews, which we were very happy with. The experience, even though it was crazy, taught me that anything is possible if you're determined, nice to people and stick to your strengths."

Of future plans, Fiona shares: "I'd like to someday have an international number one bestseller; have a few musicals on The West End and Broadway; write a few blockbuster movies...and then after I've done that I'm sure I'll create more boxes I want to tick. I know that all sounds very ambitious but go big or go home, right?" **M**

Follow Fiona's progress and more on her blog <http://alliwanttodoiswritesally.blogspot.co.uk/>

DELVIN BOOK FAIR SEEKS SELF-PUBLISHED WRITERS

On Sunday, May 4 the village of Delvin in County Westmeath will host its annual book fair which, while only running since 2010 already claims to be the largest one-day book fair in Ireland.

To give the event a link to Delvin's cultural past, Garradrimma has been included in the title. Garradrimma is a reference to the 1918 book *The Valley of the Squinting Windows* written by Brinsley MacNamara who was a native

of Delvin and who allegedly used the book to discredit some of the residents of the village at the time.

Following its publication the book became infamous after angry scenes where some people recognised themselves within the pages which resulted in a public burning of the book followed by threats to the author and his family. Then followed several court cases and 90 years of ridicule from Delvin's association with *The valley of the Squinting Windows*. These events were chronicled by Padraic O'Farrell in his 1990

publication *The Burning of Brinsley MacNamara*.

This year, to add an extra dimension to the fair, there will be a writer's corner specifically for self-published writers. Writers will be encouraged to promote their self-published works, read from them if they want, and be given an opportunity to sell their work. This writer's corner might also be a valuable day out for aspiring writers who would like to meet and talk to their peers and exchange their difficulties in getting to the publishing stage.

M



CONTACT: Micheal Murphy on 087 9409913 or Paul Carolan on 087 7436776 or see Facebook.



HEFFERNAN NOMINATED FOR MAJOR AWARD

Kate Heffernan looks set to follow in the footsteps of Sebastian Barry, Michael Harding, Conor McPherson, Enda Walsh and Eugene O'Brien having been shortlisted for the Stewart Parker Trust Awards 2013.

Cabbage Patch Kids, Chicken McNuggets, Super Mario Brothers, The Moonwalk and Portlaoise-native writer Kate Heffernan – all of these things turned 30 in 2013! Does Super Mario worry about his moustache going grey? Is there a Cabbage Patch Kid out there crying over their disappearing youth?

"On my 29th birthday I panicked about growing older for the first time ever," Heffernan confesses. "My twenties were gone and I didn't know what I had to show for it."

Kate's comedy for MIRARI Productions *In Dog Years I'm Dead* is directed by Maisie Lee and takes a comic look at this enduring obsession with 'The Big 3-0'. Kate and Maisie are Theatre Artists in Residence at Dunamais Arts Centre during 2014.

In late 2012, Kate and Maisie joined actors Marie Ruane and Rob Bannon to set up a temporary '29ish' support group, meeting with men and women aged 25-35 who shared their thoughts and feelings as they moved beyond their twenties.

"People chatted about hopes and regrets, marriage and children, values

and desires," Kate tells us. "They compared themselves to their parents at a similar age. Others spoke about not being where they thought they would be. Ten-year school reunions had come and gone and no one could believe it. Receding hairlines and wrinkles were a hot topic."

Everywhere, the phrase 'turning 30' sent shivers down spines! But what exactly is it about 'turning 30' that sets our pulses threading? With "smart dialogue, zingy gags and winning performances" (Irish Times), *In Dog Years I'm Dead* brought the ideas from the '29ish' support group to the stage, in a comic coming-to-terms tale for the newly grown-up. Selling out on its initial run during Dublin Fringe Festival 2013, *In Dog Years I'm Dead* comes to Dunamais after a month-long revival at Bewleys Café Theatre in February.

The show was recently nominated for the Stewart Parker Trust Awards 2013. This distinguished award, set up in honour of the late Belfast playwright, seeks to encourage new writers for theatre in Ireland, North and South. The main award is the New Playwright Bursary, awarded annually to an emerging playwright.

As part of the nomination, Kate will also spend a week at the Tyrone Guthrie Centre in Annaghmakerrig with the other nominees in May, at an intensive residential writing workshop led by former Literary Manager of The Royal Court, Graham Whybrow.

"I am so honoured – and frankly, a little shocked to have been shortlisted for such a prestigious award," Heffernan says. "I am such an admirer of the work of the late, great Stewart Parker."

The winner of the bursary will be announced at a ceremony at the Lyric Theatre in Belfast in April. **M**

"I am so honoured – and frankly, a little shocked to have been shortlisted for such a prestigious award,"

SILK ROAD FILM FESTIVAL

Portarlington filmmakers Delwyn and Carla Mooney & Steinar Oli Jonsson (Icelandic) are founders of the Silk Road Film Festival that takes place for the second year in Dublin from March 19-25, 2014.

The festival welcomes films from countries, which were once part of the Silk Road historical network of ancient trade routes and focuses in particular on Asian, Arab, Persian and Middle Eastern cinema. The primary reason behind the creation of the SRFF is the establishment of a dedicated intellectual platform to introduce and study the cinema of these countries, their diverse concerns, varied aesthetic approaches and authors. SRFF is collaborating with Bahar – Centre for Intercultural Collaboration, an organisation in Ireland promoting the integration of Middle Eastern and Central Asian cultures living in Ireland. Apart from screenings, the SRFF features premieres, exhibitions, panels, chats with industry guests, free courses and workshops. **M**

For more information see www.silkroadfilmfestival.com

Kinnegad Postman Publishes First Novel

Kinnegad postman Hugh Flanagan has published his first novel entitled *Hiding Ugly Children*. "Not a lot of people know that I write fiction, but I've been writing for the last 10 years," says Hugh.

Flanagan, who is originally from county Offaly, admits that he is a latecomer to the writing scene. "I started about 12 years ago. I wrote the eulogy for my father's funeral and afterwards someone said it was so moving that I should try my hand at writing. After a few false starts I found my way to the Offaly Writers' Group and came under the watchful editorial eye of Malcolm Ross MacDonald."

Hiding Ugly Children was his second attempt at a book. "I got good feedback," says Flanagan. Robert Hale Ltd in London called it "a very impressive typescript" but thought that the religious connotations in the story would not sell well in Britain. "However they sent it to their agent in Ireland, Somerville Press, who really liked it but, they had already made the decision of discontinuing fiction from the start of 2013."

Then Brian Langan of Transworld said: "I think you are a strong writer with a strong sense of time and place," but he advised he could not take a chance on a new writer.

"It is possibly easier to win the National Lottery than to get published

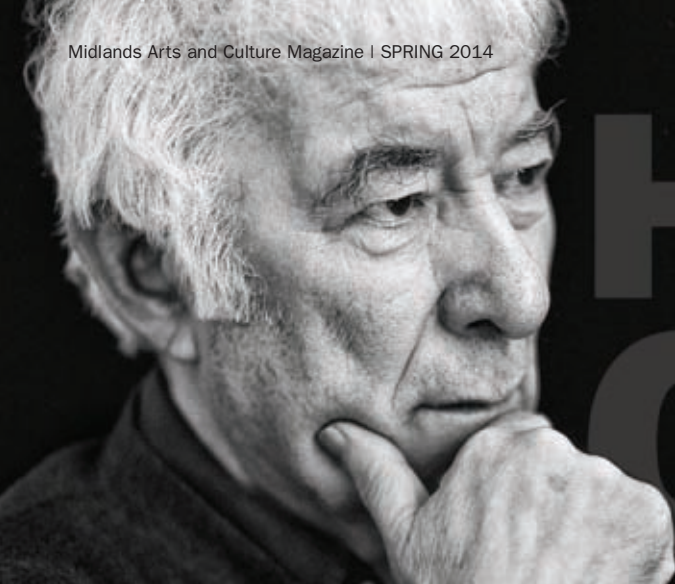
at the present time, so I made the decision to self-publish with Amazon and CreateSpace...It has worked for E L James, author of *Fifty Shades of Grey* and others, so you'd never know!"

Hiding Ugly Children is an amateur detective story set in the Irish Midlands. Joggy Jackson is asked by friend Luke who is convicted for a murder to clear his name. But he opens up old but still sore wounds within the small village of Kilpatrick – "secrets were like ugly children hidden in the dark... and until I started this thing I had no idea how many of them were hiding." **M**

Hiding Ugly Children is available from Flemings in Kinnegad, Days Bazaar in Mullingar and all Midland bookshops, from Amazon in paperback and by download for Kindle and on Hugh's own website www.hughflanigan.ie

Until the end of April, magazine readers can avail of the special price of €9.99 including post and packaging. www.hughflanigan.ie





HUMAN CHAIN

Jean O'Brien remembers
Seamus Heaney and pens
poem in his honour.

Like most members of what Theo Dorgan describes as 'The Standing Army' (of poets), I was lucky enough to have occasional contact with our late and much-loved Laureate, Seamus Heaney. To me, as to all whom he came in contact with, he was endlessly kind and patient, despite living what can only have been a busy, busy life, with many and various calls on his time.

I just want to recall my last contact with Heaney, which I am now so grateful for.

On the day before Christmas 2012 we lost another great critic and poet Dennis O'Driscoll. O'Driscoll was a close friend of Heaney's and published a book of interviews with Heaney called *Stepping Stones*.

I found myself walking up the hill to the graveyard in Naas beside Heaney and his wife Marie – it was a rare thing to find him alone. I made some comment about the difficulty of walking up the hill with a cardiac pacemaker, having one myself and knowing that Heaney had one also. He made some reply about our age, at which I responded indignantly, that he

could "feck off" and that he was much older than I. He took it in the spirit it was intended with a loud laugh and that famous twinkle. His wife, seeing that he appeared to be safe and comfortable in my company, went on ahead and joined some friends.

We talked a little about the poetry of Robert Frost and other things. I then mentioned that if we were in Heaney's hometown of Bellaghy we would be walking uphill behind a lone piper as is the tradition there. Heaney chuckled and said "Dennis would be horrified at the idea of that, he would want Gregorian chant at the least". We had a good laugh and were then joined by others; my brief private audience was over.

Little did either of us know then that a few short months later he too would be dead. One day last August I opened the Irish Times to the poignant picture of a lone, kilted piper leading Heaney's coffin through the streets of Bellaghy to St Mary's Church. He was buried just yards away from his brother Christopher, who died as a child and for whom Seamus wrote the haunting lines in his poem Mid-Term

The human soul is the weight of a snipe
On the day Séamus Heaney died, the children had
just returned to school, suddenly the park was deserted.
Those same children were even now opening their books
to recite Mid-Term Break or When All The Others Were Away
at Mass and knew there would be no more.
At the river, the red rust of hidden bridge girders
was exposed as I dipped below them onto the shore.
Skeins of words purled over stones
cutting channels in the gravelly river bed.
The blue of sky lying shadow-trapped on the surface of the stream.
Exhorted to keep alive the child within the well spring of poetry,
I thought it fitting to ride the high zip-wire,
straddling its seat, I clutched the chain and just let go.
Bright air parted
as I skelped by, hair billowing, squalls surged and curled in my wake.
I plunged and plunged again through gauzy space
almost tumbling into the circling wall of murmuring hazel and alder.
Light as a rising bog bleater this green last day of summer broke open.

Break. 'A four foot box, a foot for every year'. I thought of our conversation and burst into tears.

This poem is a small offering to my reaction to the news of Seamus Heaney's death. The title is taken from a line of his own

poetry and it's true – I did fly down the zip wire in a quiet park in the Midlands, pacemaker notwithstanding. In the words of Father Dolan, the priest who presided over Heaney's funeral: "May the green sods of Bellaghy rest gently upon him." **M**

Organic growth a key feature of emerging gallery spaces in Westmeath as garden centre transforms into gallery

In early 2010 the garden centre in Crowdstown, Delvin, run by Hazel Revington-Cross and Dave O'Shea made space on one wall to hang some art. It was an experiment to see the reaction of customers coming into a rural garden

Culture Night last September.

It has also been a place for artists to work with the pupils of St Patrick's local primary school and host art and craft workshops.

The range of art over the years went from being mainly local artists to include exceptional national and international artists. O'Shea organised the first exhibition by an international artist last July (2013) when Mike Hamblin flew in from the US to exhibit in the space. His

from little acorns grow big trees

centre. It was so well received by locals that they knew immediately it had to stay. And so a major transformation took place and what was once a garden shed was converted into a permanent art gallery, officially opened by artist Graham Knuttel.

Over the next three years the gallery developed and occasionally served as a mini theatre, where actress Mary McEvoy performed plays with the most recent being *Waiting* by Jennifer Johnson for

exhibition Inspirations included a very special portrait of the late Dublin footballer and Australian Rules legend Jim Stynes, which was presented at a private viewing to his parents, who were home from Australia. Bernard Flynn who was a good friend of Stynes officially opened the exhibition the next day.

At the end of 2013 to O'Shea and Revington-Cross decided to get out of the business of selling plants and the garden centre was dismantled leaving



the duo free to put all their energy into promoting art in Westmeath.

It had also become apparent that there just wasn't enough wall space to hold the growing number of works by artists who wanted to exhibit their work in the Garden Gallery.

And so, they found another premise for some of the work. What was once the Garden Gallery has now been renamed Purple Raven Art. The location hasn't

changed, but where there was once a garden centre has now been made into much needed parking space. Purple Raven Art is being run by Revington-Cross and as well as exhibiting art it will now also be a local and Irish craft centre, where it is hoped there will be workshops throughout the year.

The second gallery, The Chimera Gallery is being run by O'Shea and is located in Mullingar on Spout Well Lane. The Chimera Gallery is a larger space and can hold a lot more artwork. **M**

For more information see:
www.purpleravenart.com and
www.chimera-gallery.com

SCHOOLS IN LAOIS GET ARTISTIC

Laois runs the Artists-in-Schools Scheme allowing collaboration between artists in any art form and pupils from primary and second level schools. During the 10 years of the programme, up to 80 Laois schools have benefitted from some wonderfully creative and imaginative arts projects, and worked with highly professional artists. Following an application and selection process seven schools were selected to be included in the 2013 programme.

Emo National School worked with visual artist Vera McEvoy on a fibre art project and students and teachers collectively enjoyed the whole experience which included revisiting or learning the practice of sewing.

Killanure National School worked on a living willow sculpture project with artist Nora Reilly that including weaving and constructing processes. Student Fiona Delaney says of the project: "It was fun to build it together. It was really interesting and we loved learning about trees, especially willow and how to plant them properly."

Maryborough National School, Portlaoise worked with dance artist Erica Borges on a creative dance project. Erica used the connection between maths and dance to develop the students' artistic ability and understanding of dance, encouraging them to see dance as an art form. As well as contributing to the Physical Educational Programme it presented mathematics in a less daunting and more appealing way, using time, shape, figures and space. Student Caitlin says: "I really enjoyed the creative sessions that involved solving maths problems." At end of the project students performed for teachers, fellow students and parents. Less limitations multiplied by creativity.

Rosenallis National School completed a drama project with drama tutor Siobhan Coffey where students learned new techniques and gained confidence. Class teacher says: "Siobhan's enthusiasm was infectious and the use of photographs to capture different dramatic scenes created by the children was fantastic." A performance drawing on material covered in the workshops took place on the last day of the workshops with parents and all students from the school attending.

Newtown National School worked with drumming tutor Eddie O'Neill where the students learned a lot about rhythm and beat and were given the opportunity to put it into practice. The programme included an outdoor performance of a piece called Cuckoo and all students in the school participated.

St Joseph's National School, Borris in Ossory enjoyed visits from writer Jean O'Brien for a poetry and literature project. The children got the opportunity to write their own poems that are now laminated and displayed in the school. Luke from 6th Class says: "I liked when Jean came to us. I had lots of fun. She did haikus and poems with us. I wish she could stay with us for longer. I wanted to be good at poems and now I am thanks to Jean."

Visual artist Kathleen Garrett who worked visited **St Francis Special School**, Portlaoise on a mixed media arts project. **M**

The Arts Office, Laois County Council is committed to sustainable educational programmes in the arts that support opportunities for learning as well as developing skills in a range of art forms both within and outside of the formal education sector. The Artist-in-Schools Programme allows the students to have an in-depth experience with the professional artist and gives them the opportunity to experience different art media.

Contact the artsoff@laoiscoco.ie or visit www.laois.ie for more info on the Artists in Schools Scheme.

Tullamore Graduate Wins Top Design Award in China

Lara Hanlon, a recent graduate of the Visual Communications programme at IADT Dun Laoghaire has won the New Star Award at the Shenzhen Design Award for Young Talents in China.

Lara's multi-disciplinary visual communications project www.entomoproject.eu attempted to answer the questions: could insects offer a new sustainable food source? and if so what cultural prejudices would need to be overcome before insects could form a part of our daily diet?

Lara explains: "Insects provide a healthy alternative to beef, pork, and poultry and are promoted by international organisations including the UN as a feasible and wholesome option for ending world hunger. Through education and promotion of gourmet cuisine, *éntomo* challenges cultural prejudices associated with eating insects in the western world and provides people with the means to explore bugs as a sustainable, tasty and nutritious food source."

Her winning project is an online resource

that includes information about entomophagy (the practice of eating insects), original insect recipes, user testing videos, infographics and more.

"My project showcased my skills and abilities in both design for digital and print media, as well as concept development and editorial work," she says.

The Shenzhen Design Award was organised by the city of Shenzhen in China as part of its UNESCO City of Design programme and attracted entries from established professionals and graduate designers around the world.

Lara's award in Shenzhen is further recognition of the quality and innovation of design graduates emerging from third level design programmes in Ireland. IADT is currently the only Irish institution on the list of the top 100 European

Design Schools.

Lara travelled from Ireland to Shenzhen in March 2014 to receive her award and prize of \$5,000 and three nights' accommodation in the city at a gala ceremony. Her work was showcased at a major exhibition alongside all of the international submissions.

"Winning this award has been outstanding and completely unexpected. The project, although, in many ways hypothetical, may allow me to pursue further development and exploration of *éntomo* as a digital educational tool and/or brand for sustainable foods. I believe there is real potential in *éntomo* and could open some very exciting doors for me."

She is currently working in Dublin as a graphic designer. Following graduation Hanlon joined Atelier David Smith – an independent graphic design practice in Dublin, after which she worked at the Science Gallery in the capital city.

M

PORTLAOISE ARTIST PUBLISHES BOOK TO CELEBRATE JOYCE



June 16 marks the 110th anniversary of Bloomsday – the day that the writings of James Joyce are celebrated throughout the world – and to commemorate this, Portlaoise artist Thomas McNally will publish a book of illustrations based on Joyce's last great masterpiece, *Finnegans Wake*.

McNally's book called *The Ondt and the Gracehoper* by James Joyce, focuses specifically on Joyce's re-telling of Aesop's ancient fable of The Ant and Grasshopper.

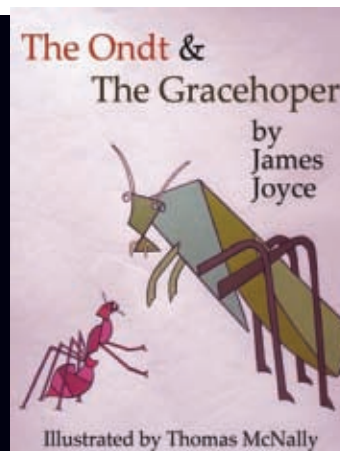
The book consists of a series of high-quality colour illustrations alongside Joyce's text. Although Aesop's fable is well known and has been illustrated many times over the centuries, Joyce's peculiar take on it has never been illustrated before.

McNally's illustrations depict the hilarious events that unfold around the rivalry between

the two protagonists: the self-righteous and power-hungry Ondt and the whimsical and lazy Gracehoper. Above all, the images highlight Joyce's use of comedic and farcical elements in telling his story.

McNally has created these illustrations with the intention of offering readers a much-needed entry-point into Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, which is often said to be one of the most difficult books to understand. However, McNally is convinced that the humour and wordplay that are present throughout Joyce's book can be enjoyed by everyone as soon as they go beyond its difficult surface.

His goal is to use Joyce's fable of *The Ondt and the Gracehoper* to highlight to readers the kind of enjoyment that can be experienced by focusing on Joyce's strange use of language. The illustrations guide readers through the text and present a unique visual re-imagining of the tale.



In addition to Joyce's text and the illustrations, the book contains an illustrator's introduction by McNally and an essay by Danis Rose, one of the world's leading experts on Joyce and *Finnegans Wake*.

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Birr Theatre 125th Anniversary.

L-R Michael McGoldrick, Emma Nee Haslam (Venue Manager), Brendan Gleeson, Marcela Corcoran Kennedy TD, (Chair of Birr Theatre and Arts Centre) Dirk Powell, Francis Gaffney (Photo: Ger Rogers)

Star of the screen Brendan Gleeson helps Offaly celebrate

Comparisons and contrasts, imagined and actual, can be made between the opening of Oxmantown Hall in January 1989 and the 125th anniversary celebrated this year, says Rosalind Fanning

However, in the manager's preliminaries to the evening's entertainment on the January 15, 2014, 'Please switch off your mobile phones' would not have been heard from the stage in 1889.

Arriving at its familiar portal, the building is a whimsical vision of heraldic carvings and half-timbering: as incongruous to its sedate Georgian neighbours across the mall, as it was back then.

The Birr Theatre & Arts Centre (renamed after its 1996 restoration) was originally described as being 'framed by tall ancestral Elms'. Now the mullioned and leaded windows in its facade look out upon mature horse chestnut trees. In late spring their blossom-candles perfume the night air; in late autumn, they shed their conkers for collecting, or crunching under foot.

Enter the concert-goers on a chilly night: an ebullient account was printed in the King's County Chronicle two days after the opening event in 1889. Well over 300 people had crowded in. Booked tickets at three shillings had gone on sale a week before but the great unbooked at one shilling a head had to muscle in. "By 8.15 the Hall was completely

filled, jammed to the door; some 150 who had no tickets having forced the cash into the doorkeepers' hands and themselves into the porch," reports at the time said.

A much more tame and well-ordered crowd arrived at the theatre this first month night in 2014. Full to the brim is now 220. This concert had sold out well before the night, with 40 on a waiting list.

The original, small vestibule with cloakrooms for ladies and gentlemen to left and right, has undergone two transformations. Nowadays, one steps into a brightly-lit reception area. White walls and white tiled floor, with a contrasting rich, dark wood reception counter.

One Victorian fireplace remains, aflame with tall candles. It's a spacious reception that is also very much a gallery for changing art exhibitions. Courteously milling, ticket-holders were still able to enjoy the annual Common Ground exhibition, entitled *New Beginnings*.

Calming, soft jazz was playing in the background while people were escorted with smiles and seated within. On stage, four red chairs. Between them, the

instruments and accoutrements of the musicians to come.

But first, the speeches: Emma Nee Haslam, who has been manager of the arts centre for over a decade introduced the 'very special occasion', with an extract from a witty poem. It had been written and read by Toler Garvey, JP before the curtain was raised on the opening concert and home-grown 'dramatic entertainment'. These were organised by Cassandra, Countess of Rosse and performed by her illustrious party, which included an astronomer. Emma on the other hand, equipped with the opportune tour schedule for illustrious Powell, Gleeson, McGoldrick and Gaffney, persuaded Music Network to alter their route dates via central Birr.

Marcella Corcoran Kennedy, TD, Secretary of the Stage Guild, gave some of the background as to the purchase of the theatre – private and public funding – complimenting Frank McNamara's tenacity and the committee which rallied around him, and thanked many of the people long-associated with the Stage Guild. She introduced Maureen de Forge, a stalwart of the Stage Guild, in particular to her promotion of dance, who in glowing

admiration for her hard work, made an unexpected presentation to Emma.

Following the applause and a warm introduction, the musicians came on stage. All were straining and holding breath to catch first sight of Brendan Gleeson. Perhaps too many not quite as aware that the famed and remarkable actor before us, was playing with legendary musical geniuses Dirk, Michael and Francis. Their first tune was a slow one from West Virginia, which led seamlessly into a vivacious Irish jig. Through the concert they switched effortlessly to other instruments: the fiddler picked up his mandolin, the fluter gathered up uilleann pipes, the banjo player reached for his red and gold accordian and the guitarist reached for a different guitar.

Between their rustic-voiced songs and dreamtime music, the gentlemen recounted some charming stories, made quips and told a few quirky jokes. How pleasingly it all melded – roots intertwining – Irish traditional and old time American music of the Appalachian mountains, Kentucky, Louisiana-Cajun and more. How comfortably the new foursome played together. And though they'd formed together only a week ago, declared it was the most enjoyable of tours.

On this January night it was the magic of 'the four', their good company and their great music-making which awoke an exuberance in the audience: whoops, whistles, HOORAYS! throughout, and at the end thundering feet, brought them back for a short but memorable encore and a greatly-deserved standing ovation.

At its conception in the late-1880s, the hall had been built for 'multifarious use' and benefit of all in the town. Since its reincarnation in the mid-1990s it has been rightfully described as, 'the backbone of the local community and wider catchment area'. This little theatre is the key element in support of so many aspects of the arts in Birr and the county: it an essential venue for the Offaly film festival; I.F.O.N.L.Y. Dance, Hullabaloo Children's Arts Festival and of course, one of the longest running arts festivals in the country, Birr Vintage Week.

Brendan Gleeson had spoken of 'the power of music and trust, to break down barriers'. One imagines the theatre's quaint and magical appearance helps to entice all levels of society and age groups through its doors. Management has always made the effort to include a richly diverse range of entertainments and creative workshops in its quarterly programmes. 125 years ago the ticket holders for the opening event had been described as wearing formal 'full dress'. Though a few may mourn the days of such corsetted elegance; ribbons, frills, stiff collars and tails, in these egalitarian days of the 21st century, 'as long as you have clothes on', says the manager, you'll be welcomed into the theatre

Hollywood star Brendan Gleeson praises FilmOffaly

Offaly's film commission FilmOffaly has been given a welcome boost from Hollywood actor Brendan Gleeson who has endorsed the county as a production location and praised Offaly County Council's commission for its "can-do" attitude.

And in efforts to attract even more films to the county Offaly has introduced the FilmOffaly Vendor Card. The card – the first of its kind in Ireland – entitles production companies to a discount of up to 25 per cent on accommodation and services with participating businesses in the county.

No stranger to Offaly, Gleeson starred alongside his son Brian in his eldest son Domhnall's short film Noreen which was shot in Offaly.

Domhnall's script, selected from 120 entries by professional script readers,

won the first FilmOffaly bursary award. He went on to direct and shoot the film on location in the county in January 2010.

In a recent exclusive interview with the commission, Gleeson revealed: "There was a real can-do kind of feeling amongst the people here...everything that we needed was there, it was there by hook or by crook or it was there because it was well prepared."

He said "not being at the centre of Los Angeles or not being in a massive cosmopolitan urban centre has its own strength". And added: "I would have no problem at all coming down here and shooting again, or rather, I would look forward to it. We had a great experience here."

Offaly County Council Arts Officer Sinead O'Reilly was delighted Gleeson agreed to the interview. "We absolutely appreciate what he did and I was amazed at how much time he gave us."

O'Reilly also said that she believes Domhnall Gleeson's film *Noreen* set the standard for the FilmOffaly bursary

award. Another previous winner of the award was *Toy Soldiers*, which went on to win Best First Short at Galway Film Fleadh in 2012 and Best Short at the Belfast Film Festival in 2013.

The interview with Gleeson was premiered at the launch of the FilmOffaly Vendor Card which also received special praise.

Naoise Barry of the Irish Film Board remarked: "Offaly is now well tooled up to attract big productions in the county, and this proactive scheme no doubt will be emulated, which makes our job, pitching Ireland as allocation much easier."

Offaly is already proving a popular location for film crews such as *The Participants*, *Our Unfenced Country*, *Hunter Gatherer* and *A Nightingale Falling* all due to hit screens this year. **M**

For more information about FilmOffaly, its bursaries or to support the film industry please see www.filmoffaly.ie

Ireland first film vendor card is good for Offaly businesses

FilmOffaly, Offaly County Council's Film Commission, has launched the FilmOffaly Vendor Card. The Vendor Card seeks to attract more film production companies into Offaly and give participating local businesses a chance to share in the lucrative film market. Already 30 businesses in Offaly have signed up to the scheme, offering productions 10–25 per cent discount on services such as accommodation, restaurants,

catering, tool hire, taxi's and more.

The recent TV pilot for *Reign* in Charleville Castle in 2013 saw 130 cast and crew come to Tullamore for six days using a wide range of services from local petrol stations to hotels and restaurants.

Already this year, a feature Irish film is set to go on location this February and March in various locations around the county.

"This is a unique project for a local authority in Ireland, and it will give us a better competitive edge when attracting film productions into Offaly. It is a win/win

situation for everyone and highlights a compelling case for the innovative way the arts can bring economic development to a county," says Cllr Nichola Hogan, Chairperson of FilmOffaly.

Participating businesses are advertised free of charge on www.filmoffaly.ie (a one-stop shop for Film Companies wishing to film in Offaly). Film companies are issued with a card to present to participating business for their discount while they are on location.

Businesses interested in participating should contact FilmOffaly at filmoffaly@offalycoco.ie or on 057 9357400 to request an application form.



FilmOffaly Vendor Card Launch. L-R Sinead O'Reilly, Luke Smith (Leonardo intern with FilmOffaly), Naoise Barry (Film Commission, Irish Film Board) Antonia Campbell Hughes (actress) Marcella Corcoran Kennedy TD (FilmOffaly) and Alan Fitzpatrick, (MD, Filmbase)

Briefs

ATRIUM EXHIBITIONS IN TULLAMORE

Offaly County Council has expanded how the public can use the atrium for exhibition by inviting applications from schools, groups and organisations as well as artists (individual and groups).

So far they have had exhibitions by the Slieve Bloom Photography Group, Rehabcare, as well as artists, which are demonstrating the quality of artistic endeavor throughout the community and their 2014 programme is well underway.

"It is important that the local authority is inclusive of creative and cultural activity in all aspects of the community and we are delighted for groups to come in and have ownership of the space and perhaps for the first time take their work to a new audience," says Sinead O'Reilly, Arts Officer.

To enquire about using the space please email arts@offalycoco.ie

A LITTLE MÓR

MÓR was conceived in the summer of 2013 as a collaborative project for Culture Night and as a way to engage new audiences.

The idea was to gather as many original local musicians as possible, to step out of their comfort zones, develop a progressive approach to music making and create something unique.

Musicians, drummers, bass, guitar and keyboard players, singers, songwriters and producers each set out to create a style of music foreign to them. They mixed their genres from rock to contemporary, experimental to soul even a little jazz and combined songs to create a completely original sound. Each songwriter brought

A number of Midland musicians from different musical backgrounds have come together to form Public Access Arts' historic collaborative house band MÓR. The band aims to develop how original music is made, performed and listened to both locally and to a wider audience.

Public Access Arts is developing the idea of a youth band A little MÓR.

M

Anyone interested in becoming involved should contact Tim from Public Access Arts on 086 6065487, or at publicaccessarts@gmail.com or follow MÓR and Public Access Arts on Facebook.



ICONIC MUSICAL IN CLARA

Clara Musical Society treads the boards for its 43rd year with a production of biblical proportions - the rock opera Jesus Christ Superstar which is a dramatized version of the last seven days in the life of Jesus of Nazareth.

Penned by Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice just over 40 years ago, the show began life as a concept LP (album) before becoming a full staged production on Broadway. The rest, as they say, is history.

Once again Clara Musical Society has drawn a cast from both the local and surrounding areas, led by Stephen Rabbette as Jesus, John Conroy as Judas and Sinead Farrell as Mary Magdalene.

Musical direction, once again, is by Alan Recks with Lea Carroll joining the production team for the first time as Choreographer.

This iconic show will be staged in the GAA Centre, Clara from Tuesday, April 8 to Saturday, April 12.

For bookings and further information please call the Society on 087 9366247, visit the website www.clarams.com or follow on Facebook.

WEB & SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGIES FOR VISUAL ARTISTS

Creative entrepreneur Mary Carty is to deliver a workshop on Web & Social Media Strategies for Visual Artists on Friday, March 28. This is a Visual Artists Ireland partnership training event with Dunamase Arts Centre. Carty is CEO of the BAFTA-nominated design agency Spoiltchild.com and over the past 10 years she has built a startup company, co-founded a conference as well as run a digital agency. She is an experienced startup mentor, helping creative companies to communicating their story. If you want to learn more email monica@visualartists.ie

Mary and her co-author Cecile Stranger-Thorsen discuss their new book *Sell, Artist, Sell!* www.marycarty.com

"In *Sell, Artist, Sell!* we make the argument that artists can combine creative and financial freedom. With digital technology the artist's role has changed and gatekeepers no longer decide your success. To thrive in the digital world you have to establish the mindset of a creative entrepreneur, based on the principles that: business is good; you own your audience and that change, while inevitable, brings opportunity. We'd like to see artists adopting new ways to promote their work and develop their livelihood.

Often artists have a hang-up about earning money perhaps because of the way by which visual art often has to gain cultural before monetary value. Artists may feel 'we can't make a living from our work' or that art world influencers will perceive commercialising an aspect of our practice, negatively. Independent filmmakers are slaves to distributors and designers to clients. In short, does a creative life have to result in being destitute, a sell-out, or oscillation between both states?

The Third Way

Lets look at a third strategy; doing what you love with the support of your audience and by creating other sources of funding. This doesn't have to cost you your creative freedom or integrity. To achieve this new way of working, look at your relationship with money and your attitude to running your practice.

As traditional gatekeepers lose traction (think about the music industry for example) there are fantastic new opportunities for artists to reach out to their audience through social media. In other words, build your own profile, gather your audience and supporters together and keep them engaging with your work.

Are you ready for this workshop?

For some artists, creative freedom may mean having the 'final cut', for some it may be the right to be left alone while they get on with the process. Likewise, some may define financial freedom as having the same social security as a regular job, to others, it may mean living for less or not having to think about money."

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JACK L LAUNCHES SCHOOL OF ROCK & POP

The internationally renowned singer and musician, Jack L has officially launched the Music Generation Laois School of Rock and Pop in the Portlaoise Youth Café.

The new School of Rock and Pop offers affordable group lessons in guitar (bass, electric and acoustic), keyboard and drums, and caters for beginner, intermediate and advanced students.

The School of Rock and Pop offers young people in Laois the opportunity to develop their musical talents, by providing music lessons, mentoring, performance opportunities as well as a range of once-off workshops in song-writing and

music technology. Weekly Jam-time, for more experienced musicians has proved hugely popular.

Music Generation Laois, in association with Laois Partnership Company, also delivers a weekly Glee Club in the Portlaoise Youth Café. A combined concert featuring Glee Club members and School of Rock and Pop musicians will be staged in the Dunamaise Theatre, Portlaoise in June 2014. **M**



For more on the Music Generation Laois School of Rock and Pop or to sign up for lessons contact 057 8664078 or see www.musicgenerationlaois.ie



Jack L and Rosa Flannery, Co-ordinator, Music Generation Laois

output of sound recordings over his long career.

"I feel that the designer, Michael Guilfoyle, achieved a great sense of empathy with his subject in the overall design and like the singing of John McCormack himself I'm sure this coin will endure and will be appreciated for many years to come.

"With a limited issue of 8,000 coins and a worldwide interest in McCormack I predict that very soon these coins will be changing hands at prices far greater than their issue price of €44."

Mayor of Athlone Gabrielle McFadden agrees: "It was a great honor for me to be at the unveiling of this John McCormack coin at the Dublin launch. I was completely bowled over with the esteem that John McCormack is held by one and all and it really is something very special for Athlone. As an Athlonian and a Westmeath lady, this coin will immortalise John McCormack in history books." **M**

The limited John McCormack coin can be purchased by downloading an order form from www.centralbank.ie, by calling 1890 307 607 or directly from the Central Bank on Dame Street in Dublin.

Pictured here with the commemorative John Count McCormack coin which has just been released in memory of Westmeath's finest tenor is his great great grandson Jonathon Tinne



Great great granddaughter of John Count McCormack Gaia Tinne is pictured here with the newly launched commemorative coin.

Commemorative Coin to Celebrate John Count McCormack

by Louise Coghlan

"I live again the days and evenings of my long career. I dream at night of operas and concerts in which I have had my share of success. Now like the old Irish minstrel, I have hung up my harp because my songs are all sung."

— John Count McCormack.

The Central Bank of Ireland has created 8,000 silver proof €10 euro coins to commemorate the memory of John Count McCormack, who was one of the Ireland's greatest tenors.

Gearoid O'Brien, Senior Executive Librarian with Westmeath County Library and author of *John McCormack and Athlone* says: "We, in Athlone, are particularly pleased that John McCormack

has been honored in this way, and especially coming as it does in the year that Athlone Town Council is set to honor him with a newly commissioned sculpture to be sited outside Athlone Civic Centre facing into the newly refurbished (and renamed) John Count McCormack Square."

As a keen coin collector himself O'Brien adds: "This coin maintains the very high standard set by the Central Bank of Ireland for their commemorative proof coin issues. It depicts a strong side profile of McCormack on the concert stage, nicely framed by theatrical drapes, and central to the design is a gramophone record and the arm of an old wind-up gramophone recalling the tenor's huge

Briefs



LAOIS YOUTH DANCE ENSEMBLE SEEKING NEW MEMBERS

Laois Youth Dance Ensemble is a contemporary dance group that strives for excellence and gives opportunities to young dancers to participate in the creation, production and performance of contemporary dance works.

It started last September from a dream and the passion of dance artist Erica Borges and Dunamaise Arts Centre has embraced her vision by supporting this newly formed dance group to achieve quality and freshness in all they do.

Despite financial challenges weekly workshops continue to take place on Saturdays, at Dunamaise Arts Centre, Portlaoise.

If you're 12 or over, passionate and committed about dance contact Erica for details on 087-1328852 or see www.laoisdanceacademy.com



FIRST SOLO EXHIBITION FOR KAVANAGH

Aileen Kavanagh will present her first solo exhibition in her hometown of Tullamore this April 2014.

Entitled *Retrospect*, this new body of work reflects on the passage of time in her life's journey.

This collection of paintings is abstract, expressive and through the use of colour, form and texture she has created tangible moments that are real and atmospheric.

Inspired by personal nostalgic images, this work has a universal quality, which will appeal to many viewers. Kavanagh is a graduate in Fine Art from GMIT and has been working towards this show for the past two years. The exhibition will be on show in Áras an Chontae, Tullamore from April 4 to 30.



CONTEMPLATION ON A RESIDENCY

By Artist Cólín Rush

Artist Cólín Rushe, was resident artist in The LaoisArthouse Stradbally, from April 2012 to April 2013, as recipient of the 2012/13 Arthouse Studio Award for NCAD graduates.

I began my residency devoid of a specific aim and favoured interaction with local groups as a means to begin. As this interaction progressed, I noticed I couldn't discern any distinct, singular direction and it wasn't until the completion of the works that a theme could be identified.

I worked with three local groups. The first group was composed of individuals assembled by the previous artist. I couldn't have hoped for a nicer collective and although I encountered resistance to my style of practice, this was ultimately to my benefit, as it forced an exploration for all involved as to how best to marry our artistic drives.

I accrued a second, smaller group of painters who came regularly to the studio in The Arthouse. I made good friends among this group, and the participants broadened their practice. Accomplished as they were I feel they must have improved over time. It's easy to believe this as they were all so talented!

I also had interactions with a third group, the Stradbally Youth Theatre – A talented

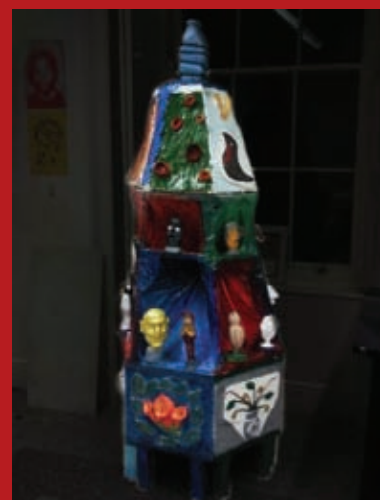
and pleasant group. I'm grateful to them for facilitating me. It was a period of growth. This often comes with some measure of accident. In theatre I'm an infant.

I'd begun an engagement of talk therapy called Psychosynthesis, a branch of psychology fashioned by an Italian, Roberto Assagioli, similar to Karl Jung. Assagioli believed we all access the same unconscious and at a deeper level, we are all one. It's not that I thought him wrong but to say so aloud and with an audience seemed brave. I didn't expect

whom confessed no knowledge of its origins. I was fitting it when I noticed it mimicked the overall shape of the entire structure. It was atop itself again so to speak.

The shape haunted me and then driving to the Main Street I was struck by its doppelganger! The O'Higgins memorial filled my gaze. I'd tried to avoid using a point of historical interest as a starting point for the residency, but the O'Higgins memorial, located in the Court Square, Stradbally, had manifested itself again a hundred yards over, in my studio. Our collective unconscious had tricked me, and happily our work was done.

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BEALTAINÉ FESTIVAL 2014 IN LAOIS

Events for 2014 include performances by the Carnation Theatre Company and the Laois Federation ICA choir for residents and out-patients in Care Hospitals in the county. A performance by the Butterfly Theatre Company in Mountmellick Library and an Exhibition and workshops at the Arthouse, Stradbally as well as lots of creative events in other Libraries and community venues for our older community.

A highlight of the Dunamais Arts Centre programme is a performance of 'Small Plastic Wars' on Friday 9 May at 2pm followed by 'Afternoon Tea'. The programme will also include a Showbands show as well as film screenings and weekly dance classes.

The Arts Office, Laois County Council will publish a comprehensive

programme of events happening around the county in May. If you wish to have your event listed please contact the Arts Office on 057 8664033/13 or email artsoff@laoiscoco.ie.

Celebrating creativity as we age, an estimated 120,000 people now take part in the Bealtaine festival, making it one of Ireland's biggest arts festivals. From dance to cinema, painting to theatre, Bealtaine showcases the talents and creativity of both first-time and professional older artists. This year the theme for the festival is 'And catch the hearth off guard', a phrase from Seamus Heaney's poem Postscript. You can find out all you need to know about Bealtaine 2014 from the festival website www.bealtaine.com.



Celebration of Positive Mental Health

by Aoife Carberry

Photographs taken by Longford students have been published in a book celebrating positive mental health.

As part of the Longford Schools Photography Programme, delivered by Shelley Corcoran and Longford Arts Office with Longford Arts Officer Fergus Kennedy, transition year students focused on positive mental health to take part in a nationwide photography competition.

Students from Moyne Community School; Cnoc Mhuire, Granard; Mercy Secondary School, Ballymahon and Meán Scoil Mhuire spent time discussing the subject, and researching the concepts for their photographs.

On a visit to Mercy Secondary School, Finola Colgan, Development Officer of Mental Health Ireland Midlands saw their work and recognised the potential.

The end result is a book entitled Positive Mental Health Moments in Time, which was launched at the beginning of February. Containing the students' photographs and accompanying phrases, the book is a celebration of positive mental health.

Corcoran said at the launch: "I'm really proud of the book, really thrilled with the work and their dedication."



Students, teachers, and representatives of the Longford Mental Health Association and Mental Health Ireland Midlands were in attendance, and the students came in for high praise for their work.

Liam Tierney, psychiatric nurse and Chairman of the Longford Mental Health Association said that the book was "phenomenal" adding that "people can identify with the different phrases depending on their own circumstances".

The students themselves also took to the floor at the launch, with students from three of the four schools providing entertainment in the form of music and dance.

Students then came forward to explain what the project meant to them, with many admitting that they now felt it was acceptable to discuss their feelings and their mental health with others.

A student of Meán Scoil Mhuire, Grace Kenny, admits that she didn't know a lot about positive mental health until she took part in the programme. "It was nice to focus on the good side of mental health, rather than the negative" she explains.

M

Positive Mental Health Moments in Time is available for €3 from any of the participating schools and the Longford Mental Health Association.

All proceeds go to the Longford Mental Health Association. An electronic copy of the book may be viewed at www.midlandcollegeofphotography.ie

SECOND BOOK FOR LONGFORD WRITER

by Aoife Carberry

Echo Fields, the second publication by Longford writer Rose Moran (RSM) was launched last November in the Longford Library.

Published by Lapwing, Moran explains that the book is a dedication to her parents and brothers who have passed away.

"I've been writing in a while and I had lots of pieces written," Rose says, explaining that the Chairperson of the Lanesboro writing group of which she is a member, suggested she send her work to Lapwing.

Though most of the pieces had been written some years ago, Rose found that when she looked at them again, she was still happy with them, keeping changes to the writing to a minimum.

Gathering about 40 of her poems together late last year, Rose sent one on to Lapwing and received a reply that same day, asking for the other poems to be sent on. By November 11, the book was at the printers, and on Tuesday, November 26, the book was launched by poet and playwright Noel Monahan!

"I didn't expect to do anything as soon" Moran admits, saying that the process had gone far quicker than expected.

With subjects in the book including her parents and brothers and her native Abbeyshrule, Moran feels that though it's personal "it wasn't so personal as not to be general" explaining that many people could relate to her pieces.

She admits that publishing the book did help her emotionally, and when the memories in the book were released, she found that more memories came forward.

With this book focusing on her childhood, her native place, and those close to her, Moran feels that there's a continuation to the book, with Lapwing agreeing that it was a good place to begin with the question "Who am I?"

She acknowledges the continued help and support from Arts Officer, Fergus Kennedy, County Librarian, Mary Carleton Reynolds and Lapwing.

The local writer also commends her writers group, saying that the other members offer "great help and great encouragement". **M**



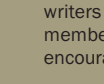
If you can change your mind,
you can change your life



Education Cluster
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www.longfordeducation.ie



County of Longford
Longford
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www.longford.ie



County Arts Services
Longford
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Briefs

WHAT'S ON AT TUAR ARD?

DRAMA & PERFORMANCES

Sat April 12

Mary Fox's Speech & Drama Class

Speech & Drama Feis Competition in poetry, improvisation, solo acting & write your own poems.

For further enquiries please contact Mary on 087-8941197.

Sun April 13

Midlands' Youth Orchestra

The Midlands Youth Orchestra is based in Kinnegad and provides an opportunity for young people from various ensembles across the Midlands to perform together under conductor and director Vincent Hunt. The Lir Youth Orchestra is the Westmeath Orchestra of the Midlands Youth Orchestra, both projects are supported by Westmeath County Council and Westmeath VEC.

8pm • €10

Tues May 13 and Wed, May 14

Moate Youth Theatre presents

Beauty & the Beast

A beautiful daughter dreams of meeting a handsome prince, but in order to save her father's life, she leaves home to live with a terrible, frightening beast. His disarming generosity slowly leads to a surprising connection. Directed by Rufina Recks. 7.30pm • €10 / €8

ART EXHIBITIONS

From Fri April 11, 8pm

Art exhibition eMerge by local amateur artists from

Lesley Wingfield's art class.

It is advisable to ring 090 6482042 in advance of viewing. Weekend viewing by appointment only.

Tues May 20

Bealtaine Festival

The Bealtaine Festival Variety Show in Association with Rosemount GAA Social Initiative returns to Tuar Ard for an evening of music, song, dance and recitation. Refreshments will be served at 6.30pm in the coffee shop prior to the show. Artists include Ballymore Comhaltas Group, Johnny Mullen and many more. 7.30-9.00pm • €5 • Admission by ticket only. Call: 090 6482042.

FILMS

Tues April 8, 8pm

The Broken Circle Breakdown

Director: Felix Van Groeningen. Runtime: 111 mins. Language: Belgian. Genre: Drama. Elise (a tattoo artist) and Didier (a banjo player in a Bluegrass/Country combo) fall in love at first sight, in spite of their differences. He talks, she listens. He's a romantic atheist, she's a religious realist. When their daughter becomes seriously ill, their love is put on trial.

Tues May 6, 8pm

Blancanieves

Director: Pablo Berger. Runtime: 145 mins. Language: English. Genre: Art House. This delightful and beautiful artistic film is a twist on the Snow White fairy tale that is set in 1920's Seville and centred on a female bullfighter.

For more see www.tuarard.com, call 090 64 82042 or email: info@tuarard.ie

PERCENT FOR ART SCHEME FOR LORETO COLLEGE

The Principal, staff and board of management of Loreto College Mullingar under the Department of Education & Science, Per-Cent-for-Art scheme are embarking on a body of work with glass artist Michelle O'Donnell who has been awarded the Per Cent for Art Commission for the creation of new artworks for both the new and old school building.

O'Donnell was selected based on her creative interpretation of the brief with the main theme for the artwork looking at the life and legacy of Mary Ward, founder of the Loreto Order.

Artwork One is a light box, which will be located in the old convent building at a point that very much connects the old to the new. Here the story of Mary's journey

throughout her life is going to be represented in vibrant use of colour and symbolism.

Artwork Two will be located in the new general-purpose area. Here O'Donnell wishes to illustrate the journey of the school's past, present and future students. Again through use of colour and symbolism, she has represented students as petals that blossom and grow as they transcend life's journey in school and beyond.

O'Donnell has involved past and present students and staff in the creation of the artworks thereby giving ownership of the work to the greater Loreto community. She has also provided workshops in the craft of glass fusing and enameling to

students and Art teachers in the school.

She established her own business Glasshammer Designs in 1993, after pursuing a successful career as a freelance Glass Artist working in New York, Boston, Belgium and Paris for Irish based companies.

O'Donnell has worked for public and private Art commissions and her work covers a very broad spectrum from internal architectural commissions to public state body and public sculpture.

Her purpose built studio is located in Rhode in County Offaly. Work is currently well under way in the studio on the Loreto artworks and it is envisaged that both pieces will be unveiled this April. **M**



LEINSTER FLEADH CHEOIL FOR MOATE

By Enda Seery,

PRO 2014 Leinster Fleadh Cheoil

Up to 10,000 trad lovers from all over Leinster and beyond will travel to Moate this summer for the Leinster Fleadh Cheoil which runs from July 7-13 – the first time the event has returned to the county since it was held in Mullingar in 1999.

The festival will be hosted by Westmeath County Board of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann in conjunction with the Leinster Council of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann. Westmeath has played a significant role in the development of Comhaltas over the years; indeed Comhaltas was founded in Mullingar in 1951.

Westmeath boasts seven Comhaltas branches. Moate, Castletown Geoghegan,



Mullingar, Ballynacargy, Clann Lir (Castlepollard), Frank Gavigan (Milltown/Rathconrath) and Ballymore branches will be working together led by the organising committee of Westmeath County Board to make this July's Leinster Fleadh Cheoil the best provincial Fleadh possible.

The Leinster Fleadh Cheoil sees more than 3,500 people taking part in music, singing and dancing competitions. It will also feature live entertainment on an open-air gig-rig stage, nightly music sessions in the pubs, concerts, workshops, recitals, céilís, singing sessions and lots more.

Over 150 volunteers will make sure that safety and enjoyment are paramount for all.

According to Pádraic Keena, Chairperson of Westmeath County Board of Comhaltas and one of the members of the main organising committee: "With the Leinster Fleadh in Westmeath, we have the opportunity of leaving a lasting legacy for the traditional arts and culture in the county."

One of the core principles of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann is to actively engage young people to play music, sing and dance and to promote the wonderful traditional culture that exists in Ireland. **M**

Wayne Brennan to release second studio album



Three years ago, inspiration had run low and life as a singer songwriter for Wayne Brennan was becoming heavy and tiresome rather than being spontaneous and in the moment.

Looking for something new, a new adventure, new inspiration and new experiences, Brennan set off from Daingean in Offaly and moved to Fuerteventura in the Canary Islands.

He based himself there for two years and from the 'Island of eternal spring' he travelled to many exotic locations across the world whilst writing his new album.

"Sometimes in life inspiration needs to be sought out. You can't simply wait and hope for that magical moment to come along. You have to go and look, both inside yourself and also in the world around you. More so, you need to believe in it and then it will come to you," explains Brennan.

Live, Love, Sing and Dance is the latest exhibition of Wayne's skills as a songwriter and is a collection of moments, situations and feelings from some of the world's most

beautiful Islands. Songs were written on Fuerteventura in the Canaries, Bali in Indonesia, Koh Lanta and Koh Phangan in Thailand, Ponza in Italy, Barry Island in Wales, London and of course in his home Island of Ireland.

Songs from the album, yet to be released, have already garnered four prestigious awards, one of which was for his finely crafted ballad *Roots in These Lands*. The song was written about growing up in Offaly and the beauty of his home county and country. The song won the Seán McCarthy Ballad Contest and first place in the RTÉ-RAAP Bursary awards. *Roots in These Lands* was written during the weeklong trip on the Grand Canal from Shannon Harbour to Edenderry in 2012 for the documentary film *A Grand Experience* that was commissioned by Offaly County Council and shown on RTÉ to critical acclaim.

Brennan released his debut album *In My Hands* in 2009. Currently based in London, Wayne will be returning to Ireland to begin his nationwide tour and will be playing a homecoming gig in Tullamore for the people of Offaly.

M

See www.waynebrennan.com His new album will be available from April 4, 2014.

Tullamore Man Voted Best in the World



Tullamore's Brendan Fox, a visual artist and theatre practitioner, has won the prestigious International Undergraduate Award for 2013, by innovatively bringing both disciplines together.

Fox received his medal in Dublin City Hall at the International Undergraduate Global Summit for his work *Crossed Line*. Not only is Fox recognised as the best undergraduate student of visual arts in Ireland, but he also won the overall international award, making him the leader in his field globally.

The three-day summit at the end of the 2013 saw 22 top undergraduates from all over the world, gather in Dublin. Brendan's essay was one of almost 4,000 pieces of coursework submitted from 182 third-level institutions internationally.

As a winner of the overall international category, his piece will now be featured in the annual Undergraduate Awards Journal and exhibited at the annual UA Visual Exhibition in March 2014.

Crossed Line is described by Fox as a "triptych filmic intervention" inspired by the one woman play, *The Human Voice* written by Jean Cocteau in 1930. The story centres around a middle aged woman's emotional journey when she realises her estranged lover is to marry a younger woman. The entire script is a one sided conversation performed by the female protagonist; the male character is never heard or shown but personified by a telephone.

Like many plays *The Human Voice* has had multiple interpretations on stage, television and cinema screens; beyond this it is full of theatrical codes harking back to the Dadaists' Vox Humana experiments after World War I.

"My chosen version for this work was *The Human Voice* starring Ingrid Bergman and directed by Ted Kotcheff for TV in 1966. I wanted to re-imagine the narrative from the male character's perspective and constructed an alternative script, sometimes mirroring, often filling in the blanks between the female characters lines, pushing my own agenda."

At its core, *Crossed Line* is about the breakdown of communication, but it is also a deep consideration of how it feels to exist with the hopelessness of a broken heart.

Fox explains: "The idea of representing the human condition before an audience through linear or absurd narratives really appeals to me. My work often centres on the appropriation of cinematic material that has theatrical origins. I try to invite the viewer to engage theatrically with my work, extending a perspective that perhaps the cinema or theatre alone cannot."

"Much like a theatre or film director may strive to find a fresh angle in a known narrative; my final installations often push an agenda that has evolved through the dissection of a literary text. I hope to engage the viewer by offering them a way into the work. It's simply an invitation."

Fox holds a BA Hon's Degree in Fine Art Media from The National College of Art and Design and works predominantly in the medium of video but his work often encompasses painting, performance and large scale installations. **M**

For further information see: www.brendanfoxart.com





Caroline Coyle, Rose Finerty, Jackie Gorman and Brenda Burke picked up the award for *Poetry in the Park* at the Voluntary Arts Scotland's national conference, Culture, Creativity and You: Why Making Matters and the Epic Awards Winners' Reception in Glasgow in February.

Poetry in the Park came about in January 2013 when the idea of a community owned poetry gathering was initialised.

Then followed monthly meetings in Burgess Park, beside the river Shannon and the weir wall to read poetry, recite poetry or read stories and recently *Poetry in the Park Chapbook* was published.

Poetry in the Park has two key ambitions. Firstly it aims to bring poetry outdoors into various communities through a range of actions, mediums and environments which challenges people's perceptions about poetry, how it is delivered and how we can relate to it.

And secondly all ages, races and abilities are welcome as a key aim of the group is inclusiveness for all.

Throughout 2013, *Poetry in the Park* held a number of other community events and workshops incorporating poetry, art and music. Events held included poetry in the bog at dawn celebrating Seamus Heaney's poetry and then the bog at dusk in September commemorating Heaney's month's anniversary. There was also flute music and poetry at the Springwell, bog art events, Samhain by the Shannon and music gatherings.

The group consists of about 20 core members and more than 200 occasional members ranging in age from six to 86 with people travelling from Mullingar, Longford, Portlaoise to participate. **M**

For Further Information See:
<http://blog.epicawards.co.uk/2013/12/poetry-in-the-park/>

POETRY IN THE PARK PLANS FOR 2014

- Poetry in the Library, presenting Community Engagement through Poetry and reciting some poems in the Goldsmith Library Thursday, March 27 at noon.
- Facilitating a poetry retreat/Birdsong in Feevagh Woods, a 12 acre farm in county Roscommon in April.
- Hosting a poetry reading (Poems and Uilleann Pipes) in the Athlone Castle in May as part of the All Ireland Drama Festival.
- Collaborating with published poets re workshops, poetry writing sessions.
- Conducting poetry workshops in prisons.
- Facilitating community poetry workshops in nursing homes for older people, hospitals, community centres, schools, colleges.
- Community Poetry Readings in Athlone library for Poetry Week in October.
- Preparing for the Second Edition of Poetry in the Park's Community Poetry Collection
- Regular Poetry in the Park meet-ups in Burgess Park Athlone.

IWA VISIT ATHLONE GALLERY

Members of the Irish Wheelchair Association in Offaly recently traveled with Anam Beo artist facilitators, Rowena Keaveny and Julie Spollen, to visit the new Luan Gallery in Athlone to see an exhibition of selected works from the Irish Museum of Modern Art.

By invitation of Anam Beo, two curators from IMMA travelled to meet with the group and discuss the artwork exhibited. Afterwards participants were able to have a short creative response downstairs in the workshop area of the gallery.

In 2013 Anam Beo Offaly's Arts and Health programme provided 163 art workshops to 105 participants with 1053 attendances.

For more see: anambeo.wordpress.com or contact anambeoart@gmail.com



Members of the Offaly IWA who participate in Anam Beo, Offaly Arts and Health programme at the Luan Gallery to see work from the IMMA collection.

Longford Artist Contributes to New Art Publication

by Aoife Carberry

Longford-based artist Michael McCarthy is one of a number of artists to contribute to an art publication entitled, *The Old Pier, Union Hall*.

The book, by Paul and Aileen Finucane, shows pictures painted by different artists of the same view – the view from the couple's house in Cork.

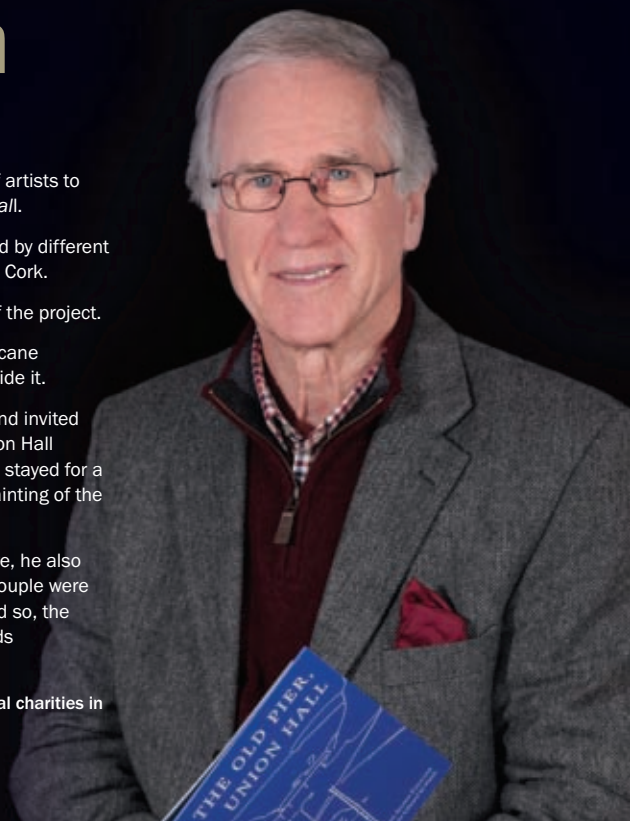
McCarthy says that he is "very privileged" to have been part of the project.

Explaining how the book first started, he says that Aileen Finucane inherited an old fisherman's house, as well as the land alongside it.

Fans of art, the couple, while in Australia, met an Irish artist and invited him back to Ireland, suggesting that he could stay at their Union Hall cottage. The artist, Harry Sherwin, accepted the invitation and stayed for a while in Cork. Upon leaving, he presented the couple with a painting of the view from the cottage.

A friend of Harry's also visited the couple, and on his departure, he also presented them with his own painting of the same view. The couple were astounded at the different characterisation of the harbour, and so, the project continued, with artists of various ages and backgrounds contributing their work to the publication.

The Old Pier, Union Hall is now on sale with proceeds going to local charities in Union Hall through the Union Hall Development Association. **M**





Eoin MacLochlainn explores the notion of **DÍDEAN** *(home)*

I have been visiting Portlaoise for the last few years, teaching art in the prison and working on various Artist-in-Prison projects, so I was delighted when I was offered the opportunity to exhibit my work at Dunamais Arts Centre.

The title of this exhibition is *Dídean/Home* and it consists of paintings and installations exploring the human dimension to the economic crisis and looking at notions of "home".

In recent years, much has been written about ghost estates, empty hotels and tenantless apartment blocks, at one time an estimated 300,000 units vacant or unfinished, but at the same time we read about the growing problem of homelessness in our country.

My work engages with contradictions such as these but, whilst the subject matter may be tough and the questions raised uncomfortable, my primary intention is to

make art that moves people.

So I collect images from newspapers, magazines and the Internet to find the subjects for my artworks.

I am particularly interested in images of ordinary people in situations of conflict or crisis. It is all too easy to become inured to the individual stories that lie behind any of these images, but by choosing one and making it the subject of a large painting, for instance, I try to emphasize the importance of that human story and, in a way, to subvert the notion of the "15 minutes of fame".

I am interested in exploring how art may produce a deeper and more enduring understanding of the contemporary experience than do media images.

From a formal point of view I became interested in using discarded material in my artwork – cardboard, newspaper, paper coffee cups etc. I thought that it fitted well with the themes I was exploring.

The empty coffee cups became a symbol for me of the 'boom and bust'. During the era of the *Celtic Tiger*, it seemed like everyone was in a hurry – in a hurry to get to work, in a hurry to make money, in a hurry to build. No time to stop and chat, a quick coffee on the go, skinny lattes, cappuccinos, caffè mochas – madness – and then at the end of the day, the poor man on the street was using the empty cup to beg for help.

I also became interested in using cardboard in my work. If I was homeless and I had a piece of cardboard and a black marker, would I use them to write: "I'm Hungry, Please Help", or would I start making art, right there on the street? As an artist,

I feel grateful that I can create images out of thin air. I can picture places I'd like to be, things I could have... That's why I called my installation of cardboard drawings: "Where there is art, there is hope".

In the end, making art is a mysterious occupation. Working alone in the studio, I paint, I make things, I try out ideas, and sometimes my mistakes inspire new directions and new work... to borrow a quote from the late Tony O'Malley: "you work at it day after day and then suddenly, something happens, a revelation". That's how it is.

Eoin MacLochlainn graduated from NCAD in 2000. He is a founder member of the artists' collective Tondo. He won The Golden Fleece Award for his work in 2008, was shortlisted for the Davy Portrait Award in 2010 and won the ESB Keating McLaughlin Medal at the RHA the same year.

He has had 10 solo exhibitions in Ireland and has participated in several selected exhibitions (including RHA, RUA, Iontas, Éigse, Oireachtas) and in various group shows in Ireland, England, France, Belgium, Georgia and China. His work is in the collections of the OPW, AIB, Bank of Ireland, AXA Insurance, University of Limerick, Wesley College, the Boyle Civic Collection and in various private collections.

M

See [www.emacl.com](http://emacl.com) and <http://emacl.wordpress.com/>
Dídean/Home runs at Dunamais Arts Centre, Portlaoise, from Friday 7 March – Saturday 26 April with an Opening Reception on Friday 7 March, at 7pm. Artists' talks or workshops can be arranged on request by calling 057 8663355.





artists explore the idea of home

Throughout 2014, Laois-native writer **Kate Heffernan** will join director **Maisie Lee** of MIRARI Productions as Dunamaisie Arts Centre's Theatre Artists in Residence. Based at Dunamaisie, Heffernan and Lee are inviting the community to discuss and explore with them ideas of 'home' and what it means to us as individuals and as a community, working towards the production of a show with a local cast in late 2014.

Heffernan grew up in Portlaoise, and worked at the Dunamaisie Arts Centre in various capacities while studying at secondary school and later at Trinity College Dublin. She is also a former member of Laois Youth Theatre, run by the Laois Arts Office and Shake the Speare Theatre Company.

"When Dunamaisie opened in 1999 I was about to enter transition year at Scoil Chríost Rí," she recalls. "Those early days were such an exciting time. I had never been to a theatre performance before and it was a real moment of awakening. I completely fell in love with theatre at that point. And Dunamaisie became a sort of brilliant haven for me. It was a home in so many ways."

Returning to the centre as one half of MIRARI Productions, Kate is keen to reengage and reconnect with the idea of



Kate Heffernan



Maisie Lee

home and its myriad of meanings.

The residency will culminate in a performance for radio with a local cast in late 2014, written by Heffernan and directed by Lee, and based on ideas that will emerge from their discussions with the community.

"We are very interested in radio as a medium that expertly reaches people in their own homes," explains Heffernan. "And we'd like to connect people in this way," Lee adds. "To speak to them in their own homes through the brilliant form of radio play, a form Kate and I are both fascinated and excited by."

The pair kicked off the residency this spring with a period of research – including discussions, workshops and other activities – in which they are exploring with groups and individuals what 'home' means to them in the widest sense. And they really want people to get in touch with them, to get involved.

"Home is for the community and about the community," Lee says. "And so we want to hear from you, to hear what 'home' means to you or your group. We want you to get in touch, to tell us your ideas."

"Maybe you'd like to have us round to your place!" Heffernan concludes. "To chat about your home over a cuppa. So we're asking individuals and groups to invite us to the place they call home – inviting you to invite us round for tea. And in return promising to bring the biscuits!"

M

To find out more visit the MIRARI section at www.dunamaisie.ie. Home is supported by The Arts Council, Dunamaisie Arts Centre and Laois County Council.

the relevance of rural art dialogues...

Veronica Nicholson talks about being an artist on a farm and how she seeks out its relevance to her practice through international online rural art dialogues.

In 2010 I moved to Offaly while doing an MA in NCAD. Ever since leaving Dublin in 1994 I've preferred living in the country, and have now settled on a farm near Rhode, the same farm where my mother grew up and where my uncle still lives.

In response to living on the farm, in 2013 I began a project called *Deep Map*, inspired by the author William Least Heat-Moon in his book *PrairieEarth* (A Deep Map):

"Deep maps include and interweave autobiography, archaeology, stories, memories, folklore, traces, reportage, weather, interviews, natural history, science, and intuition. In its best form, the resulting work arrives at a subtle, multi-layered and "deep" map of a small area of the earth."

To research a deep map of this 'small area of the earth,' that is the townland where I live and work seemed a worthwhile and important endeavour, especially since the keepers of the myth and stories of this area are dying out. So with a sense of urgency I began recording with audio, photographs, and drawings the various seams of meaning and memory. The farm has proved a rich mine of inspiration.

As a result of working on this project I was invited by Outrider Artists in Co Clare to participate in a series of workshops with artists from Estonia, Latvia and Ireland in May 2013 <http://the-future-is-domestic.blogspot.ie/>

Also in 2013 I was invited to participate in Yak Yak: rural/art dialogues, a multi-cultural, multi-media event, curated by Fiona Woods, an artist from Co Clare, and Ian Tully, Director of Swanhill Regional Art Gallery, Victoria, Australia. In the on-line publication the curators introduce the project:

"Yak Yak: rural/art dialogues sets out to fashion a context within which some geographically disparate cultural practices can be viewed and considered in relationship to one another. All of the practitioners [from Australia, Argentina, Ireland and Sweden]...in this project make their works in response to the complexities and challenges of particular rural situations and places with which they have engaged..."

http://issuu.com/collectionofminds/docs/yak_yak?e=1616593/5208077

I had the delightful experience of being 'twinned' (through skype) with Neil Berecny-Brown, a farmer/artist in New South Wales, Australia. Neil said of this experience:

"Meanwhile, down on the farm, life goes on...and on; timeless cycles of generation played out on tunes called by the vagaries of sun, wind and rain. Consciousness is conditioned by culture and environment; is this manifest in the work of artists living down on the farm?"

Meanwhile in another part of the forest (or the forest itself as it sometimes appears), the art/entertainment industrial complex of Biennales Art Fairs, Blockbuster touring exhibitions and Spectacles rolls on with its urban preoccupation reflecting global demographic shifts. This too is part of our environment; it gives urgency to nurturing forms of practice hidden by the trees.

But while life on the farm goes on, the farm has changed; at least mine has, because in another part of the forest there is another farm, and on that farm lives Veronica Nicholson. When we

decided to "Twin" our farms as part of the Yak Yak project, it set in train a series of exchanges and joint decision-making processes which, for me, helped articulate and manifest some aspects of an awareness to be discovered down on the farm. The process was rewarding and enjoyable and it will be valuable for me to continue these linkages as part of my practice."

Our collaboration culminated in a Cabinet de Curiosité, which was displayed as part of the Yak Yak exhibition in Swanhill Regional Art Gallery in September 2013.

The glass cabinet was filled with various farm-related items like blue binder twine and hairy barbed wire, and enveloped in transparent maps.

Being involved in projects like The Future is Domestic or Yak Yak focuses the mind and gives an impetus to the Deep Map project, and in 2014 I will continue exchanges with farmer/artists at home and abroad, so watch this space!

M

Sean-nós dancing in Westmeath: steady progress in the traditional Irish dance scene. Rosario Clinton looks back at her early days of sean-nós dancing and speaks of her love for teaching classes in the midlands.



SEAN-NÓS DANCING MAKES STEADY PROGRESS

Sean-nós dancing is said to be the oldest form of our traditional Irish dance. While attributed to Connemara and west Clare, it is danced throughout Ireland and abroad. Characterised by its low to the ground footwork, free movement of arms and an emphasis upon a battering step its personal style with spontaneous expression is highly valued.

A native of county Cork I studied different forms of Irish dance. Thanks to my Gaeltacht-born mother I was introduced to sean-nós as a young girl and it has remained a favourite of mine ever since. I later spent 19 years in Brussels and was a founding member of the Brussels Set Dancers, with whom I performed at many events, helped new members to dance and was a

competition judge.

Since moving back to Ireland I've been teaching dancing to children at schools throughout Westmeath, Longford and Dublin.

In the summer of 2011, I collaborated with Deirdre Feeney and ran the first North Westmeath Summer School of Music song and dance for children aged six to 12 years of age.

I have also given workshops in Europe and am always eager to learn more myself. I could be described as a die-hard dancer; it keeps one young and fit. I enjoy passing on what is a lovely aspect of our culture.

Clinton teaches dance in Westmeath and beyond. M



Longford teen hitting all the right notes

by Aoife Carberry



Talented Longford teenager Eimear Kyle, has been playing piano since the age of eight.

The now 13 year-old, daughter of Jianling and Michael, started playing the concert harp when she was four and a half. And, just five years after beginning her piano education, Eimear has completed all eight grades and is now preparing for a 30 minute solo recital for the Irish Academy of Music.

Eimear is also preparing for a feis in Dublin, which will take place in April during the easter holidays.

"She loves music," explains her mother, Jianling, adding that as with any subject, if you like it, you see better results, something which can be seen from Eimear's achievements thus far.

A two-time recipient of a Royal Irish Academy of Music High Achievers Award, Eimear also got the opportunity this year to perform at the prestigious awards ceremony.

Now in first year at St Finian's, Mullingar, Kyle is a student of its Schola Cantorum which provides musical education to the students alongside regular school studies. Along with singing and playing the piano and concert harp, the school requires the students to play the organ - something which Eimear has taken to with little difficulty.

With only a small number of students accepted into the Schola Cantorum each year, Kyle loves school, and enjoys spending time with her fellow musicians.

"She likes to meet people who like music," Jianling adds.

With all this under her belt at the age of 13, there's no doubt that we will be hearing a lot more from Kyle in the future. **M**

DUN NA SÍ AMENITY & HERITAGE PARK OPENS ITS GATES

by Aoife Carberry

At the heart of the Midlands Gateway in Moate, County Westmeath, is the newly named Dun na Si Amenity & Heritage Park.

From its elevated entrance, the park welcomes its guests as if awarded majestic guardianship by Ann Meldon Hugh's sculpture, *Motte Grainne Óg*, known locally with affection as 'Grainne Óg', the Milesian warrior princess of folklore who has long held strong ties with these parts.

The 27 acre parkland has been brought to fruition by the commitment of a community group, the Midland Amenity Park Association, who harnessed public support and secured part funding through the Rural Development Programme 2007-2013 by Westmeath Community Development.

Now, an area once known locally as *The Cowpark*, invites visitors to embrace another part of its heritage by following its pathway trails through native species planting and along its beautiful turlough wetland reserve, an area of great ecological value and hidden wildlife.

As the playground blends gently into its surroundings and exercise equipment is located invitingly along the pathways, there is a strong suggestion that wellbeing is the only order of the day.

This ethos is further enhanced by the Park's vision of engagement with the Arts, as is evident from exhibitions and the incorporation of permanent art pieces, created with local second level students. Some are a selection of 2D and 3D works for display, currently located both in the designated sculpture garden areas and within the wider park, but others also serve as intriguing functional pieces, such as the intermittent mosaic seating and elegantly striking bird hide at the water's edge.

In the creation of these pieces, several arts projects within the community were undertaken and remain ongoing. With past funding support from both the Arts Council of Ireland and Westmeath County Council and Arts Office, artists have facilitated creative workshops and school classes which have helped to inspire, educate, guide and assist

primary and second level students.

Collaboration with the initiative for Culture Night has seen artists Ann Wingfield and Anna S Duffy engage with children of St Brigid's Primary and St Oliver Plunkett's Boys National Schools.

The creative process involved and the research already undertaken in the schools were mutually supportive and expressed wildlife ecology through different mediums, which were then guided to life in outsized two-dimensional explosions of form with the children and additional fellow artists Patsy Preston and Lesley Wingfield.

Patsy Preston has also been Artist in Residence in Moate Community School, facilitating a dynamic pilot arts initiative with Transition Year students, known as *Art in the Park*.



"By taking part in this project, it has changed my view on art. I have worked with some great people on this project which made everything so much easier. It will be great to visit in years to come and see my mark on the park so to speak," Simon Geoghegan, TY Student, Moate Community School says.

This success was the launch pad for the wider Art in the Park initiative, a competition offering second level students across the Midlands region the opportunity to explore their design prowess and creativity.

Three specially designed Art in the

Park gardens will be home to the winning artworks for a period of one year, after which time the pieces will be returned and located either in the school or the local community for permanent display.

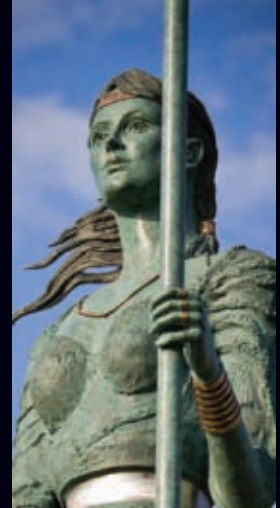
The three dimensional sculptural pieces of art are based on the students' own themes using a range of materials such as timber, concrete, stone, ceramic, mosaic, metal, organic, recycled or other material which should be able to withstand typical weather elements. In support of the project, individual schools or artists were able to submit applications to their appropriate County Arts Officer having sought an artist, or to assist with the payment of artist fees.

The judging of this year's entries will be undertaken by a panel of independent professional artists

and takes place in April, with prize giving being held on May 16 at Dun na Si Amenity and Heritage Park, which also happens to be the date of the Park's official opening.

The formulation of its two-year Arts Plan will include residencies, community arts, performances and site specific work. **M**

See www.dunnasi.ie or to get involved in Art in the Park call 090 6481183 or email dunnasimoate@eircom.net.



HENRIETTA MORAES MUSE OF FRANCIS BACON & LUCIEN FREUD WHO LIVED IN ROUNDWOOD HOUSE

Derek Fanning
recounts the eventual
and colourful life of
Henrietta Moraes –
alcoholic, unsuccessful
cat burglar and muse
of Bacon and Freud.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s Henrietta Moraes was caretaker of Roundwood House, which at the time was being restored by the Irish Georgian Society.

Moraes was a deeply-troubled woman with an infamous temper, which made people avoid her. She had problems with drugs and alcohol and her son complained that she deprived him of adequate affection.

In her younger days Moraes was a very attractive woman who moved in bohemian circles in London and was the muse and inspiration for such famous artists as Lucian Freud and Francis Bacon. Last year Bacon's painting of a naked Moraes fetched £21.3 million at auction.

She was born Audrey Wendy Abbott in Simla, India, where her father was stationed in the Indian Air Force. Her father deserted her mother when she was young, and she was raised harshly by a tyrannical and abusive grandmother in England.

Later she went to secretarial college.

By 1950, when she was 19 years old, Moraes was working as an artists' model in several London art schools. A denizen of the Colony Room, Soho, she became the muse to a number of important British artists in the early 1950s through the mid-1960s.

Francis Bacon, who was particularly enthralled by her mercurial character, painted her at least 16 times from photographs specifically commissioned by him from John Deakin. In May 2002, Bacon's *Study for Portrait of Henrietta Moraes* was sold by Ernst Beyeler for \$6.7 million, and in February 2012 Bacon's 1963 *Portrait of Henrietta Moraes* sold for £21.3 million.

Lucian Freud, with whom she had an affair, painted Moraes at least three times, including a celebrated 1953 portrait entitled *Girl in a Blanket*.

Moraes was notoriously free-spirited and led a generally hedonistic lifestyle. In the 1960s, she was an unsuccessful cat burglar hampered by amphetamine psychosis, leading to time in Holloway Prison.

As if anticipating her decline, Bacon famously painted her with a syringe a decade before she became a self-confessed "junkie".

Later in life, she found sobriety and penned a volume of short stories and memoirs (entitled *Henrietta*) with the encouragement of her friend, the writer Francis Wyndham.

In January 2013 RTÉ Radio 1 broadcast a documentary about Moraes called *Oiled: A Portrait of Henrietta* which related that for a period starting in the mid-50s, Moraes (called Hen by her friends) was the uncrowned Queen of Soho and she lived her life on the margins of the rich, the famous and the dangerous.

Dazzled by reflected glory, the documentary's narrator told us, she drifted into chronic alcoholism, drug abuse and prison. The muse of Francis Bacon and Lucian Freud ended her life in abject poverty, reliant upon the charity of others.

During her troubled lifetime she frequently sought sanctuary in Ireland. Here she found refuge amongst the crumbling Georgian mansions of the Irish midlands and sufficient peace to write her life story.

The Radio 1 documentary featured Marianne Faithfull – for whom Moraes worked as tour manager and Desmond Guinness who was one of her close friends. It also included a rare interview with Henrietta's son Josh who had a troubled relationship with his mother.

Acquainted with rock stars, aristocracy and artists, Henrietta lived her life to the full, never fearful of the future or troubled by the past.

Alcoholism was a dominant force in her life, but her beauty and presence lasted a lifetime in spite of her many excesses. She left a lasting impression upon those who came under her spell.

When she lived in Roundwood her hope was to live an ordinary, sane life freed from the madness of alcoholism but unfortunately she continued drinking excessively and also suffered from a lack of money. She returned to London and joined Alcoholics Anonymous.

Desmond Guinness recalled that one of his abiding memories of Henrietta was her "barrelling down the street in Mountrath". A local farmer recalled that she was as "mad as a hatter" adding: "She went around in great big long dresses that reached the ground. You would see her out walking the roads in those dresses. But a very nice lady."

M

Derek Fanning works as a journalist in Birr's *Midland Tribune* and is fond of poetry, classical music and wood carving. He publishes the magazine *Slieve Bloom News*. If you would like to contribute an article or photo please email derekfanning123@gmail.com





1,500 CHILDREN ARE SINGING!

Margaret Broome began as Development Officer in June 2013 with the firm intention to be ready to start working with schools by September. "We were going to have to work fast, and to be quite honest the odds were not in our favour – no tutors and no committed schools were just two of the problems facing us."

Having made the decision to concentrate on flagship project – The Kodály Programme – during academic year

2013/2014, the first job to be tackled was to find the musicians who would bring this innovative approach to music education into primary schools.

Music Generation Offaly Westmeath has nine tutors, working in 20 participating primary schools across the region, providing more than 70 hours of tuition per week to over 1,500 children from junior and senior infants to sixth class.

Music Generation Offaly Westmeath is also working with DIT Conservatory of Music & Drama, The Athlone Education Centre and the Kodály Society of Ireland to develop training that challenges, develops and supports the tutors creating these active and imaginative music lessons. This training will become the foundation for a new Diploma in Kodály Music Education the first of its kind in Ireland, which will eventually be available nationally to interested musicians and teachers.

Music Generation Offaly/Westmeath's Kodály Programme has ensured that 1,500 young people across the region are already in receipt of music education twice a week, when before they had none.

Other developments include the launch of the new Choral Music Programme, already in two community colleges and two national schools and involving nearly 100 pupils. "We are looking forward to taking these choirs to a national singfest of Music Generation choirs planned for Sunday, April 6 in Dublin." enthuses Broome.

Planning is already underway for academic year 2014/ 2015 and they are open to expressions of interest in The Kodály Programme from both pre and primary schools and from secondary and primary schools looking to engage in the Choral Programme. **M**

For more information please contact Margaret Broome on mbroome@offalycoco.ie, 057 9346898 or www.offaly.ie/musicgeneration or follow on Facebook.



ORCHESTRA ON TOUR WINS ACCOLADE

The Laois School of Music Orpheus Orchestra completed a novel idea of a Schools Tour of Laois last April/May and was subsequently acknowledged for the project with an Irish Association of Youth Orchestras (IAYO) Achievement Award, presented in February 2014 by Minister for Children and Young People Frances Fitzgerald at the National Concert Hall.

As an independent School of Music, orchestra members come from all over the county, with a total of 18 different primary schools represented. Organising a central venue for a schools concert can be challenging so the idea came to bring the orchestra out to schools for a visit instead.

The project would only work with the co-operation of parents who would have to bring their children to and from the selected schools, so they were the first point of contact with the proposal and were unanimously behind it.

It was based on the following objectives:

1. To promote the work of the Orpheus Orchestra
2. To provide performance opportunities for our players
3. To recruit new members for next year

The schools selected for a visit over a three week period were Scoil Mhuire, Sacred Heart and Maryborough NS Portlaoise; Emo NS and St Colman's NS Stradbally.

There was a real sense of being on tour in the various schools and with Conductor John Davidson, the orchestra played Sean Ryans Polka, Ye Banks & Braes, Vltava by Smetana, and a little Beethoven (Finale Symphony No 5).

Given the success of the tour it looks set to become an Annual Event in the Orpheus Orchestra calendar. **M**



VISUAL ART EXPLOSION IN LONGFORD

Though Longford has had a vibrant visual arts scene for quite some time, the last year or so has seen an impressive proliferation in the number of collectives and exhibitions aimed at bringing the works of local artists to the public's attention. Here Patrick Conboy takes a look some of the more diverse and innovative projects operating under this remit.

ENGAGE LONGFORD

One of the most recent artistic projects to emerge in the area is Engage Longford, which is run by local artists as a vehicle for procuring a permanent exhibition space, while in the meantime also arranging exhibitions in temporary galleries to display works not only by artists from the locality, but from all around the country. Engage Longford held its debut show on Culture Night 2013, and received an overwhelming response, with a large crowd turning out to view the exhibits.

"The group was established to provide a platform to promote Longford as a hub for visual art," explains Engage Longford committee member and artist, Gary Robinson. "Its fundamental objective is to procure a permanent space in order to provide exhibition opportunities for graduate and emerging artists within the county. "An important element of our idea is to include as many as possible in the arts in Longford, to try and remove the barriers that people may feel exist.

"At first we plan to develop a programme of exhibitions that will have a local community aspect to it, in that we will host exhibitions by local photography, painting and PLC art course students," he continues. "These exhibitions are programmed and we hope that the community will take the opportunity to come and see the work that is being done by local artists.

"We have an open call ready to go out to artists from all over the country, and based on the responses we get from this, a selection panel will programme a series of exhibitions over the course of 2014 and 2015."

OUT-TAKE FILMS

"Out-Take Films was formed with the aim of developing a culture of film-making in all ages in Longford," explains the group's Chairperson, Seamus Clarke. "The means to make a film are more accessible now than it's ever been before. Twenty years ago, making even the most modest of films was a two- or even a three-man job, but now technology has flattened to the point where even the capturing capacity on a phone is amazing. However, the art of film-making is still something one has to learn."

The group is a vehicle which allows budding film-makers to collaborate and provide assistance for each other. It also provides an opportunity for members to enhance their skills in all areas of film production.

"Late last year we ran a scriptwriting course, which was very well received," Clarke says. "With the help of the Arts Office in Longford, we were able to bring in a professional scriptwriter by the name of the Laurence Henson, who is well-respected and often lectures on the subject, and the response was great. We had people travelling from as far as Sligo just to attend the course."

Other such courses are in the works at present, including a six-week digital film-making course, which Out-Take intends to host this spring.

"The idea of the training programme is to see if we can engage people who are interested in shooting film with their cameras, but who have never collaborated with other film-makers or developed their skills, and who are interested in making the jump to making short fiction, documentaries or television programmes."

LONGFORD LIGHTS

Though still early in its gestation period, the proposed Longford Lights festival, pencilled in for next winter, looks set to be one of the most unique artistic events the county town has ever hosted.

"Longford Lights is an idea I've had for a year or two now, which is a visual art festival which is themed on the use of light," says organiser, Shane Crossan. "The idea is to invite artists to use public spaces, to create a performance or an installation or other piece of art, using projectors, electric lights, candles, and so on." Crossan is the driving force behind the idea at present, but is reluctant to take credit, and certainly doesn't want to be seen as the festival's curator.

"I think 'project champion' is a nicer term," he laughs. "In the past few years, curators seem to have become portrayed as being more important than the artists, and I don't want that to happen!" While no firm date is set for Longford Lights at the time of writing, the aim is to hold it when the nights are long and the main festivals are long finished.

"We're looking at doing the pilot version in November 2014. I'm trying to prioritise local artists and try and engage schools, but I also want to invite some national artists, too. The great thing is the public nature of it and that will be free."

EXHIBITIONS AT THE ATRIUM GALLERY IN ASSOCIATION WITH LONGFORD COUNTY ARTS OFFICE

"The Arts Office and the Atrium Gallery at the Backstage Theatre have come together to develop a joint programme of exhibitions to help provide support for the emerging visual arts scene in the county," Longford County Arts Officer Fergus Kennedy reveals. "At the moment it's mainly for local artists, but we've also exhibited artists from Galway, Leitrim and Mayo.

"In the first half of the year we hope to organise a series of innovative exhibitions. The first is a mother-daughter exhibition, involving Frances Kelleher and her daughter Orla, both accomplished landscape and still-life artists working in watercolours, acrylics and oils. Their show will run at the Atrium Gallery in March.

"We also want to organise an exhibition where we have five visual artists working in various media contributing works, and then invite five local contemporary writers working in poetry and prose to create pieces of literature in response to the artworks they've seen.

"There are also plans for an emerging artists' exhibition, where four emerging artists will be able to highlight their work, and in the second half of the year, there will be internal exhibitions in secondary schools, with the highlights going on to be exhibited at the Atrium. There will be awards and prize-giving and guided tours of that exhibition, where the works will be interpreted for visitors."

Kennedy concludes by saying: "These exhibitions will be funded by the Arts Office and organised jointly with the Atrium Gallery."





portrait of

Nick Miller talks to Angela Madden about taking up a residency at the Laois Arthouse, Stradbally, Co Laois this August.

"I have been painting portraits for about 25 years and building them over that period of time. I have shown lots of portraits in the past but people are probably not aware how long I have been doing it or how big a thing it is for me," says Miller.

In Mid August 2014, Miller will undertake an intensive 10-day residency at Art House, Stradbally, County Laois building on his existing body of work in portrait painting at the invitation of Muireann Ní Chonaill, Arts Officer.

There will also be a lasting legacy from him as part of his residency will see him paint oil portraits of two famous people from Laois for Laois County Council. The first of those will be of the renowned Portlaoise born sculptor, Cathy Carmen and the second subject is yet to be decided. "These will be two small

heads," explains the artist. But, fans of his work may also get the chance to be up close and personal with Miller. "Over the period of time I am at the Art House there will be a slightly more open engagement and there will be some opportunity to sit for a painting but we are not exactly sure how this is going to work yet. There will have to be some kind of system in place," Miller says.

The theme for this residency follows from a special project he carried out in 2011 in Brooklyn, NYC. "I spent 40 days painting a portrait a day," explains Miller. "In New York you are more guaranteed a steady supply of people than you would be in Sligo or Laois. People in New York have no fear about calling in and getting their portrait painted."

He tells me that he didn't know what to expect when he started on that journey in Brooklyn and the same goes for the Sligo-based artist's foray into the Midlands.

"I am looking forward to going to the Midlands but it is really about the people. It has the same interest for me whether Stradbally or Brooklyn. People are people," he says. "I do not have a preconceived notion of going to Stradbally and I like to leave it more open; I will meet people I do not know. I look forward to meeting people I do not know. It is all fresh; I have no idea."

Miller admits that being attracted to the not knowing has something to do with his character. "A lot of it for me, and this is how I have always worked, is about putting myself in a slightly awkward situation that I have to paint my way out



an artist

of. I paint my way out of tricky situations."

Miller shares that his Father was also a painter for 45 years "but a very reclusive painter" and something he came to in mid life. But, this was not such an influential force on Miller's chosen career as you might automatically imagine but somehow was intertwined in his. "I was almost leaving when he started painting. Yet, our paths are similar but different. I do not know who got there first but feel we developed in parallel." However, Miller does say that he "learned a lot" from his Father's work as he was "older, more thoughtful".

Funnily enough it took Miller a while to realize he wanted to be an artist too and he went off to uni to read Development Studies. "Mid way through

uni I thought 'oh God' I should have done art!" before adding "but, after a while I was pleased." The reason he was pleased, he describes, was because his work then developed in its own time and way without the knowledge that would have come with the formal study of art. And, he was also glad because at least he knew about what I knew from his course. "I felt that if I did not know about that then I would maybe know nothing at all!"

And he adds that in some ways it was harder for those who had gone through art college to find themselves, so to speak. "They are more professionalized in a way."

Miller likes the engagement that the Art House residency will afford him - the "shared meeting" where people engage with him, meeting him for the first time as he paints their character.

"I like being there and recording; attempting to capture something in a meeting, meeting them through painting," says Miller who adds that his way of working is open, welcoming. "It is very open, it is not set, it is not cool or closed."

At the end of the week the public will be able to pop along and view the portraits Miller has painted during his residency will run in conjunction with a show at Art House of Miller's work from the collection of the Irish Museum of Modern Art curated by Laois Arts Officer, Muireann Ní Chonaill.

More information at www.nickmiller.ie
Nick Miller is represented in Ireland by
Rubicon Gallery Dublin.
www.rubicongallery.ie

Further details from Muireann Ní Chonaill,
Arts Officer at mnichona@laoiscoco.ie
Telephone: 057 8664109

Face-to-face

JOHN ENNIS



As award-winning poet **John Ennis** gets ready to celebrate his 70th birthday in May, the Midlands Arts and Culture magazine wonders what makes the squat pen rest snug as a gun.

- Q: Like Patrick Kavanagh, there is a rural theme in a lot of your work, how did you find growing up on a farm in Westmeath influenced and shaped your poetry?
- A: The midland farmlands were full of interesting people with their own idiosyncrasies along the roads and often turns of speech to match. A very interesting place linguistically; traces of Chaucer in everyday Hiberno-English talk as well as Irish and Old Norse. "Education" has killed a lot of this; thankfully, traces remain. The fields were simultaneously drudgery and freedom.
- Q: What poets influenced you growing up and when was it that you began to write poetry yourself?
- A: Neighbour Kathleen Flanagan brought the Collected Poems of Milton into the kitchen for me when I was barely a teenager. I read Book One of Paradise Lost at one sitting and was so "full" I'd to take a walk in the fields. My father read me nursery rhymes as a toddler. I remember at his knee distinctly hearing his "John, m'lady, the sergeant said..." Aunt Judy gave me Curly Wee and Gussy Goose when all I could do was scribble. A year later I could manage to follow its jaunty rhythms and was furious with the pencil whirls I'd made on the book a year earlier. As a kid, I devoured comics and swapped these with friends like Jimmy Reid, my cousin, James Gorman and Harry Whelehan. No TV in the 1950s, my parents read the night away, and I read everything that came into the house, - westerns, romances and stories from World War 11. My parents did not exercise censorship and if they weren't reading they were swapping stories with others who rambled in at night like Harry O'Hara. As a teenager, I remember declaiming Wordsworth in the fields. I began to write poetry

under the eye of Professor Sean Lucy while at UCC. Sean was a fine poet.

Q: Having won numerous awards for your work, such as the Patrick Kavanagh Award and The Listowel Poetry Prize, how much do you feel these awards and that type or recognition matter to a poet?

A: Unfortunately, there are never enough awards to go round. Many excellent writers win nothing, except the all-important recognition of their peers. They keep with the task in hand. With me, when our kids were young, a Listowel win was expected: not if, but when are we going to Listowel, they were fussed over and there was Ballybunion and lots of ice cream. At Listowel, they said I was in the winners' enclosure so often, if I were a horse I'd be cast in bronze.

Q: Seamus Heaney famously described you as 'One of Ireland's most undeservedly neglected poets'. While Seamus Heaney was world-renowned for his poetry, is this something you feel you have unfairly missed out on?

A: Not at all. The Nobel Award Winner wrote that in the mid-eighties when I'd four books to my credit. That's risen to 14 - not to mention a place in numerous anthologies. Being chosen substantially to be among the band that constitutes The Harvard Anthology of Contemporary Irish Poetry (2010) was a real pleasure.

Q: You have worked as an academic for 40 years. What appeals to you in teaching? Do you feel that there is a need for a resurgence of interest in poetry?

A: Waterford gave me a job and security. By way of return I put my back into the work there. I spent ten years teaching and the subsequent thirty in academic administration, being first

appointed Head of Department and later Head of School. Roller coaster years! In the college in 1970, we literally started with a green field and a building on it locals pointed to as the White Elephant on the Cork Road. The Department intended the new college to remain on the lowest rung of the new RTCs with its students numbered in hundreds (not the multiple thousands it now serves). But Waterford, with the embers of Ireland's most ancient city still glowing in its soul, made an act of faith in the College, and we for our part did our damnest to have the city realise its dream, - University! By the time I retired in 2009, the area I was responsible for, Humanities with over twenty degrees, had grown to be the largest among the four Schools. I was particularly pleased so many midlanders came to Waterford. Delighted also that Irish and English are now firmly embedded on the BA Degree. Of late, I've been involved in some gratis tutorial work with English, exploring with students all over again the pleasures of Wordsworth and Creative Writing is part of their Programme. Not forgetting your last question, - poetry is always there for the listening to or reading, in the speech patterns of those round us, in text messages as much as in slim or collected volumes. I'd just as ready read a lyric by Bressie on the inside cover of his CD as open a poetry book.

Q: Your publication *Postponing Asbyrgi* is a collection of poems inspired by the music of Sigur Ros, how did that come about?

A: Just by chance, the documentary *Heima* (Home) came across the TV screen: the four lads (accompanied by the four women of Amiina) were playing some of the remotest spots imaginable in Iceland as part of a Takk (Thanks) homecoming tour. I liked the

music, in particular the concept and wordless renditions of Von, or Vonlenska (Sound of Hope Music) where the listener can attempt to articulate, if he or she wishes, his or her own thoughts in response or simply let the music wash over like waves of the sea. The celebratory poems in *Postponing Asbyrgi* come from my response.

Q: How much does music influence your poetry and your style?

A: I'm fascinated with all styles or families of music. "It don't mean a thing, if it ain't got that swing", so says the great Duke of jazz. The same applies to any poem. If the "swing" is not evident from the first line, the poet has got a dud.

Q: And, what of the midlands? Does its nature and landscape speak to you?

A: More and more I'd say. Memories and associations long buried by the world of work re-assert themselves. Getting on, one attempts to tie up the loose ends with one hand and celebrate with the other. It's suddenly struck me, there's so much to see, that's unseen, in one's own county or neck of the woods. According to Yeats a poet could explore the corner of just one field profitably over a lifetime. But a Russian proverb also states that to go through life is not as simple as crossing a field. The contemporary needs to be fully embraced.

Q: What is next for you?

A: Well, I've just completed a sequence of poems in praise of Pussy Riot *Nine Lives*. We Hope and published it on a blogspot online. I'm always amazed by the courage and fortitude of young people. Nadya and Masha, in daily danger of their lives, put the plight of others first. Since retirement in 2009, my manuscript sequences have been queuing up. As I approach my 70th birthday on May 11, I'm getting these ready to

feature on a website, where any reader interested is welcome to leave a comment. Arising out of that exercise, which mimics the original oral context of poetry, I'd hope to bring out more work.

Q: What would you say to aspiring poets and writers who are unsure how to get started?

A: Get started! Keep going. As Hopkins noted, your utterance is yours, unique, you're here for that. Talk easy, write easy. Certainly there's an element of bending your back to the task. You won't be able to spread a bank of turf in Winetown without stretching to turn the first sod, but you'll soon work to rhythm. Read plenty, especially those writers you like: examine, clinically, how they achieve their hold on you and try to do it yourself. If you workshop, let it be guided by someone with a good track record. Otherwise, it's equivalent to being taught music by a musician, who can't play. Learn your trade, as Yeats said. Learn the rudiments of IT, particularly those aspects that relate to word processing, preparation of manuscripts, websites and blogging (the social media). Happily now there are lots of outlets online (apart from established journals) for young poets. Seek them all out. Let every rejection, or sorry! received be the excuse to write another poem. Above all, don't lose a sense of joy or wonder at what you create, but remember a poem, or anything creative, is never finished, just abandoned. The work merely gives the appearance of being finished. After eleven years working on *Ulysses*, Joyce was still rushing off textual changes by telegram the morning the novel went to print. Da Vinci was still working on the Mona Lisa when his patron called to take it away.

IN WAVES BEFORE THEM

for my parents

Their kindness goes before them out in waves she taking the best fireplace coals to break them in fiery circles for underneath the bread ovens the dough in floury circles over on the table crosses index-fingered on them. And the names on each wheaten cake already, one for her own, those she sets by for the kids of a neighbour for whatever reason, left unsaid, but real, she knows. And he, before the apple walk breaks into blossom drills opened at its side, manure spread, potash obligatory, sows potato seed as hard as crabs. Later blossoms, like her cakes come down to this: she to break each day the pain barriers of hunger he, with Queens, and he not getting any younger.

HAPPINESS

After the track of the same name on Riceboy Sleeps where Jónsi and Alex celebrate their love

Because I'm deaf by percentages in both ears Well, seventy in the left and thirty in the right Since the Menière's in ninety-five left its scar I like to motor alone wherever by day or night The fiat sedici radio blasting trailing Hengilás Window way down blasting through Ballyragget Everyone asleep preferably and if the sky's Anyway clement and not the usual get Up of anvilled heaven hammering on Orri metal Leave the window that way. Before I settle To the Massey stereo and the old CD codger that fell off it Settle in the riceboys where I sleep. Pleasant it is then, no heart scald Hearing young Daniel bringing down Heysátan in the next field. Soon we'll talk, share a few words among ourselves. Love it.

SLAMMING DOORS OPEN MICS

Richard Brennan writes about the art of slam poetry and plans for a first of its type event in Tullamore this year.



Upstairs in a pub, downstairs in a café, or on a stage in a tent in a field, slam poetry is an exciting and growing performance art form.

The rules are pretty simple: it must be your own work, you must recite it from memory, no props or soundtracks allowed, and you have a maximum three minutes in which to perform.

The pieces usually rhyme, but not always. The themes run the gamut of human experience, from the politically subversive to the comically absurd. It's a daunting prospect, as the performer must be able to hold his or her audience's attention by dint of his or her voice and words alone.

It is an art form that seems to suit the Irish sensibility particularly well: the bard, the sean nos, the storyteller, the barstool philosopher, even the bit of banter as you buy the paper at your local shop. We like to talk and, judging by the crowds attending such events, we like to listen.

Spoken word has been around for a long time of course, and societies through the ages have always loved and revered a talented orator, none more so than pre Christian Gaelic society. However, slam poetry and spoken word as a modern cultural phenomenon can trace its DNA back to the beatniks and African American underground of the 1960s. Indeed the first emergence of this new art form into mainstream consciousness was arguably Gil Scott Heron's spoken word piece *The Revolution will not be Televised*, released in 1971.

Slam poetry in a competitive setting emerged in the mid 1980s in Chicago in the USA, and has grown since to become a global phenomenon. It largely exists outside of the academic and institutional domains of the universities and publishing industry and has evolved as an outlet for people of all ages and backgrounds to express their views, experiences, and emotions.

Due to its origins and evolution, it incorporates elements of stand up comedy, hip hop, and physical theatre.

I attended my first poetry slam last October in the International Bar in Wicklow Street. Fellow Tullamore Rhymers, Cormac Lally, and I signed up for the Leinster heat of the All-Ireland Poetry Slam, along with 20 or so other competitors. When your name was called out, you made your way to the stage and performed your piece, following the guidelines mentioned in the first paragraph. A curious feature of slam poetry is that the audience members click their fingers furiously if they like a particular line or phrase, rather than applauding and thereby interrupting the performer.

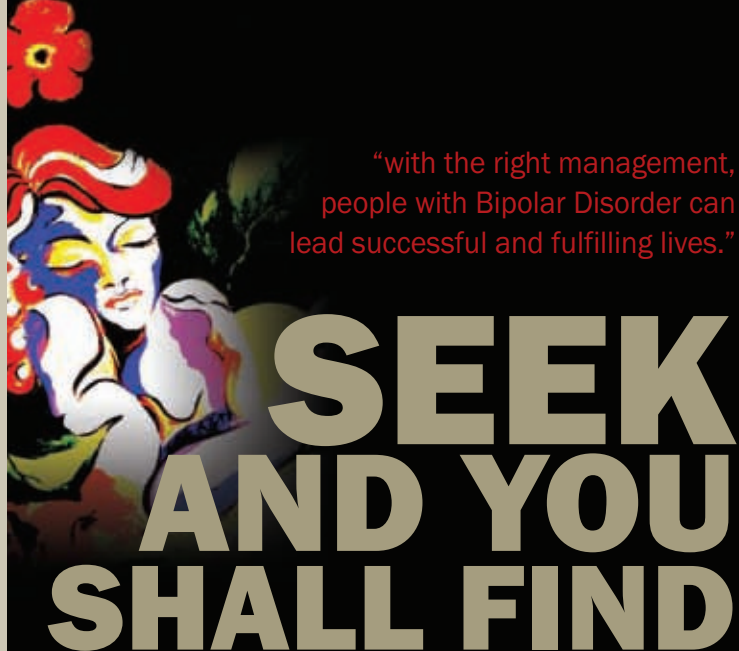
Audiences are (usually) respectfully silent

A curious feature of slam poetry is that the audience members click their fingers furiously if they like a particular line or phrase

during the performance, and noisily supportive afterwards, and the experience at the International was wonderful, indeed Cormac made it to the semi-final stage.

I was struck by the variety, the vivid language, the innovative styles and stage presence on display. It is remarkable how spellbound one can become by a solitary performer reciting on a small stage under a spotlight, weaving a tale from rhyme, rhythm, movement and timing.

The eventual winner, John Cummins, went on to win the All-Ireland event, held in



"with the right management, people with Bipolar Disorder can lead successful and fulfilling lives."

An Arts and Health Project in Offaly is to be rolled out nationally, with Athlone Institute of Technology using it as an educational resource for trainee psychiatric nurses and the HSE entering it into the Crystal Clear Health Awards.

At a time when more and more people are experiencing mental health issues or are supporting a friend or family member who has been diagnosed, a recent partnership project between The Attic Therapy Centre, Tullamore and Offaly-based arts and health organisation *Anam Beo* has been developed specifically about Bipolar Disorder.

Carrie Byrne (Clinical Nurse Manager and Art Therapist at the centre) explains the development of the project: "At the time of a Bipolar Disorder diagnosis or when a person is unwell they aren't in a suitable position to take in the information they are being given or to ask questions. After a service user led Bipolar Disorder support group was established at the centre it became evident that families and clients were in a place of isolation and started to ask if there was 'something informative' and 'user friendly' available that they could 'take home and digest'."

Over three months, *Anam Beo* artist Rowena Keaveny, together with 25 other participants and five staff members at The Attic Therapy Centre illustrated, photographed, animated and recorded voiceovers for the 20 minute animated short film and booklet, *SEEK* (Support, Empowerment, Education & Knowledge) which explores

both the science and reality of living with Bipolar Disorder.

Keaveny remarks: "When I heard about the guide I knew that it would translate really well into moving images and given the lack of 'user friendly' information around mental health issues it was a positive opportunity to work proactively in this area."

By showing a mental health condition from an honest and user-friendly perspective, the booklet and DVD are focused on empowering patients, families and carers to improve their knowledge and provide mutual support and information from other service users who have been through difficult times and have had positive outcomes.

The project also aimed to address the questions that friends and family of someone newly diagnosed may have in language that is both understandable and informative, such as, 'What is Bipolar Disorder?' 'How Is Bipolar Disorder Diagnosed?' **M**

For further information about the Bipolar Disorder Support Group and for copies of the *SEEK* (A Guide to Bipolar Disorder) booklet and 20 minute DVD contact The Attic Therapy Centre on 05793 60510 or see www.anambeo.wordpress.com

The project received support funding from Lundbeck + Janssen and The Community Foundation for Ireland.

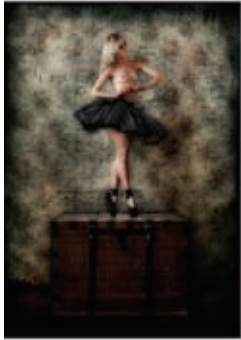
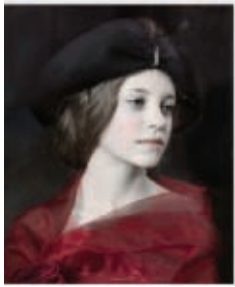
Galway in December.

There are numerous slam poetry events nationwide, with more being added all the time. Many of these events are open mic, whereby you turn up at the venue at the appointed time, put your name on a list, and wait to be summoned to the stage by the MC. It is a priceless opportunity to test your mettle, hone your craft, and gauge your work in front of a live audience.

Often, these events are held in a non licensed premises (eg a café), thereby permitting younger slam poets to perform. The Tullamore Rhymers Club intends to run the first poetry slam of its type in the midlands in 2014, featuring local and national performers and an open mic. **M**

Please check Tullamore Rhymers Club Facebook page for further details or email richiebrennan1@gmail.com





SNAP HAPPY

WINNING PANEL 2013
Drogheda Photographic Club

GOLD MEDAL WINNER
MONOCHROME SECTION
IPF NATIONAL CLUB
CHAMPIONSHIP 2013
Molly by Adrian Parkinson –
Drogheda Photographic Club



Mullingar snap happy with national photographic championships

The Irish Photographic Federation National Club Championship is set for Mullingar County Buildings and Mullingar Arts Centre from May 17 - 18.

Ireland's leading camera clubs and photography societies will come together to compete for the IPF Rose Bowl trophy with the winners taking away the title of Top Irish Club.

Over the course of the weekend Ireland's best photographers will display their best work in the atrium of the Mullingar County Buildings.

On show will be the work of camera club members who have won numerous medals and commendations at exhibitions and salons all across the globe including this year's Bronze medal at the FIAP Clubs World Cup, Drogheda Photographic Club.

Along with the display of photographs from the competition, there will also be a distinctions sitting on the Saturday, May 17, where photographers from any photographic background will seek to gain

formal qualifications and have their work assessed by panels of very experienced and accomplished photographers.

Each candidate will put forward either 10, 15 or 20 images depending on the level they are being assessed at and with usually 50-60 applicants, there will be thousands of photographs on display over the course of the weekend.

Along with the competition and distinctions sittings, there will be a number of smaller events with further details to be available shortly on the IPF website. [M](http://www.ipf.ie)

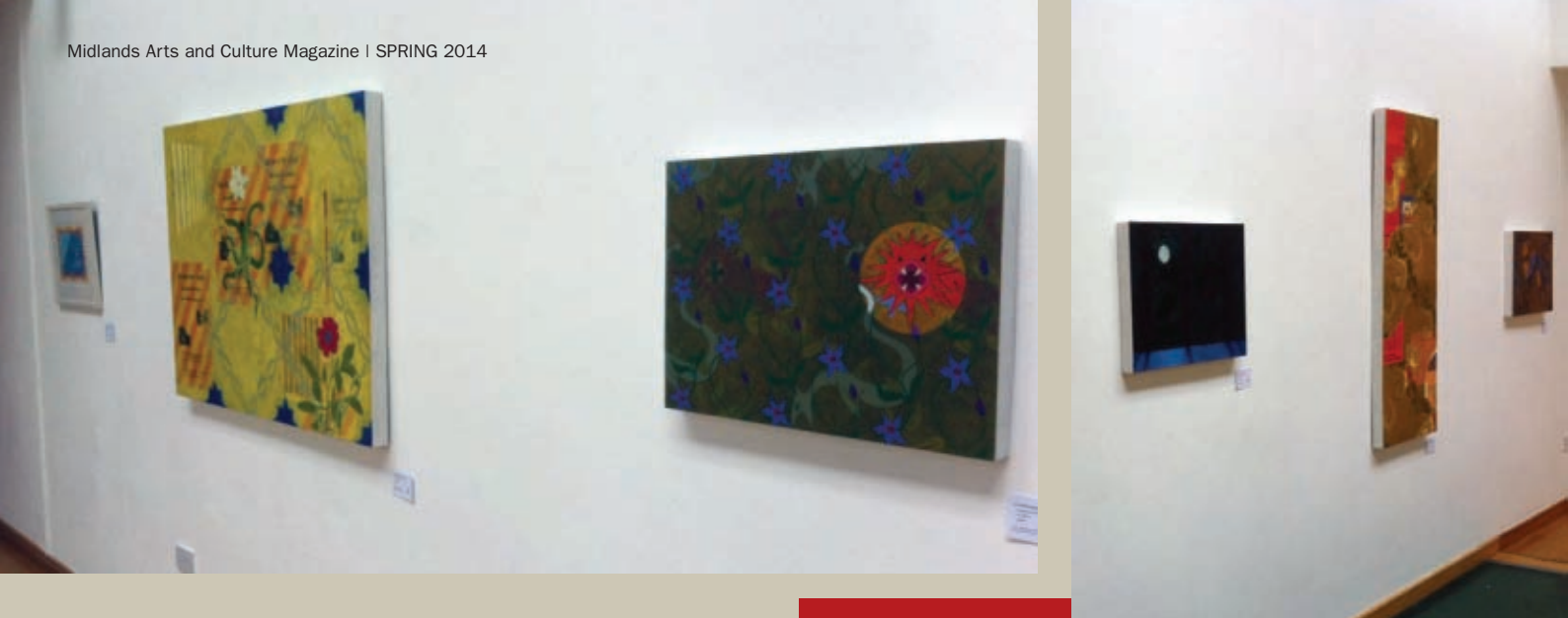


ADMISSION IS FREE

For further information see: <http://irishphoto.ie/>
[facebook.com/irishphotofederation](https://www.facebook.com/irishphotofederation)
twitter.com/#!/irish_photo or email info@irishphoto.ie



GOLD MEDAL WINNER
COLOUR SECTION
IPF NATIONAL CLUB
CHAMPIONSHIP 2013
Fairy Princess by Michael O'Sullivan
Cork Camera Group



hogg's latest exhibition

takes us on a journey of Recent Works

by Thomas Byrne

Upon entering this latest exhibition of work by artist Gavin Hogg, entitled *Recent Works*, one of the most striking features is actually the use and application of colour throughout the series writes Thomas Byrne. Oscillating between a vibrant and a dark palette, it is almost as though the artist intends for it to serve as a kind of visual iambic meter – a rhythm for a new artistic language.

The individual pieces have a curiously period feel to them – evocative of the Fin de Siècle – and resemble what one could imagine to be decorative motifs from the famous Swiss psychoanalyst Carl Jung's office – one whose work, incidentally, seems to have been a source of inspiration for the artist.

I do not use 'decorative' pejoratively, however, for many of the works on display incorporate what appear to be wallpaper patterns in their construction.

In focussing my attention beyond the superficial, though, they gradually reveal more complex forces at play.

It would seem that the repetition and also the deconstruction of patterns serve as a sort-of scrying pool for the unconscious mind – a place where the primordial, universal images more commonly referred to as 'archetypes' reside.

Indeed, the various motifs have – in a strangely contradictory way – a sense of autonomy about them.

The dragon is a recurring element too, with its vague resemblance to the Ouroboros – an alchemical symbol of a serpent consuming its own tail, which represents the cyclical nature of life. In his piece

entitled, *Personal Totem* (2010 – 2011), its significance could be that of the creative person's need for periodic renewal and rebirth in order to maintain growth.

One could interpret another latent image within the squall of lines to be something approximating a medieval sea chart – most saliently in *Beneath* (2010 – 2011), which is perhaps the beginning of a perilous journey by Hogg into the unexplored regions of his own psyche. It could even be construed as an echo of a similar trial undertaken by Jung who once embarked upon his own transformative *Night Sea Journey* and *Nekyia*.

In *Repeating Patterns* (2010 – 2012), the dragons are reconfigured as treacherous vines in a dark and foreboding surface world, which is home to a ferocious tiger – itself a mass of linear patterns. It is through the use of these fierce totems that the notion of the 'Daemon' becomes evident – the idea that residing within is a motive, creative force that compels us to fulfil our individual destinies.

In the course of his journeying and investigations, the artist realises that he is subject to the will of these mysterious forces and must simply behold their terrible majesty and triumph – *Dancing Demons* (2011), would seem to indicate humble acquiescence on his part.

The final piece, *Ma Jolie* (2011), seems to reflect on the idea of destination and takes a semiotic approach involving used rail tickets. The piece is threaded by a blossoming briar and the peeling away of defunct patterns to reveal a mire of uncertainty but one that could also represent a primordial pool of new possibilities.

2014 EVENTS AT Belvedere House Gardens & Park

APRIL 2014

Saturday 5th April
Bat Walk with Bat Conservation Ireland

Illustrated talk on Bats, dispelling all of the myths and detailing just how marvellous these tiny mammals really are. Followed by guided bat walk. Entry is free, donations if desired to Bat Conservation Ireland.

Saturday 12th April
Tony Miceli Modern Jazz Quartet
Door open at 7.30 for 8pm show.

Sunday 20th April
Easter Sunday 2014 – Easter Egg Hunt

At 12 noon sharp. Meet the Easter Bunny and join in the hunt for thousands of eggs and golden tickets.

Monday 21st April
Easter Monday – Easter Egg Hunt

At 12 noon sharp. Meet the Easter Bunny and join in the hunt for thousands of eggs and golden tickets.

MAY 2014

Wednesday 7th May
5km Mullingar Road League,
within grounds of Belvedere. For more details (times etc) Mullingar Harriers Athletics Club
www.mullingarharriers.com

For more details on any of the above events phone Belvedere House Gardens & Park, Mullingar, Co. Westmeath 044-9349060 or check out www.belvedere-house.ie

Saturday 10th May
Bat Walk with Bat Conservation Ireland

Illustrated talk on Bats, dispelling all of the myths and detailing just how marvellous these tiny mammals really are. Followed by guided bat walk. Entry is free, donations if desired to Bat Conservation Ireland.

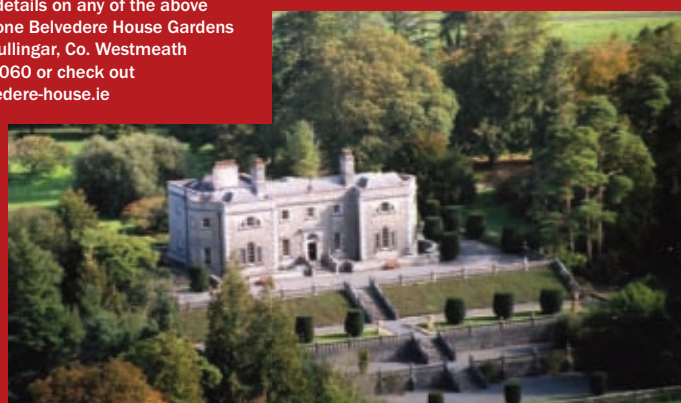
Wednesday 14th May
5km Mullingar Road League,
within grounds of Belvedere. For more details (times etc) Mullingar Harriers Athletics Club www.mullingarharriers.com

Wednesday 21st May
5km Mullingar Road League,
within grounds of Belvedere. For more details (times etc) Mullingar Harriers Athletics Club www.mullingarharriers.com

Sunday 18th May, 4am
Dawn Chorus
with BirdWatch Ireland –
Fri 23rd, Sat 24th & Sun 25th May
Life Music Festival

Award winning three day camping music festival, capacity 5,000 people. Reduced area of Belvedere parkland, including House & Walled Garden will remain open to public (TBC).
www.thelife-festival.com
Free entry event.

Wednesday 28th May
5km Mullingar Road League,
within grounds of Belvedere. For more details (times etc) Mullingar Harriers Athletics Club
www.mullingarharriers.com



museum keeps tradition of embroidery alive

Once a 17th Century Quaker settlement, Mountmellick's developed into a thriving industrial town in the 1800's culminating in it being called the Manchester of Ireland.

Mountmellick today is better known for lending its name to the unique form of Irish White on White embroidery called Mountmellick Work – the only form of embroidery from the 19th century that can claim to be entirely Irish in origin and design.

Bold designs of local flora and fauna such as blackberries, dog rose, wild clematis viola and fuchsia were used and the embroidery was carried out on white satin jean using white cotton thread and was used to decorate household items such as nightdress cases, pillow shams, quilts and sideboard cloths.

Created in the 1820's when there was a world revival of embroidery and lace making, this 'new' style combined the draughting and embroidery skills usually taught to cultured ladies of that period.

Girls in the Quaker School were instructed in the embroidery as a way to earn money for their boards.

A Government report of 1858 states that the needlework was taught in the Mountmellick Quaker School in both fancy and plain designs. Commercially the first known sale of Mountmellick Work was in 1847 and this was a quilt sold to the Earl of Dunraven, Limerick and currently on loan to the Museum.

Embroidery became a popular hobby for ladies of the Victorian era. Between 1880 and 1898 Weldon Publishers of London produced four volumes entitled *Weldon's Practical Mountmellick Embroidery* and a popular US publication *Needlecraft Practical Journal* also featured the craft. This led to a major interest in the work and it was taken up by women throughout the country and as a consequence it ceased to be a local craft.

Then around 1880 a Mrs Milner started an Industrial Association in Mountmellick to provide a livelihood for distressed gentlewomen and at its peak there were upwards of 50 women employed in producing the embroidery.

During the early 1900's combined with the effects of the World War 1 and the introduction of machine embroidery interest declined and the craft was only practiced by a handful of women.

Much of the credit for reviving Mountmellick Work lies with the late Sr Teresa Margaret McCarthy, who discovered this craft during her time with the presentation sisters in Mountmellick.

The convent was gifted a trunk of Mountmellick patterns and Sr Teresa Margaret dedicated her retirement to developing and reviving the embroidery to the world stage.

She travelled the length and breadth of Ireland promoting Mountmellick Embroidery and thanks to her perseverance it is now known and appreciated worldwide again.

Mountmellick Development Association is committed to keeping this craft alive by providing a home for the extensive collection of embroidery both donated to and purchased by the association and every Tuesday night from September to March the Museum holds a drop-in class for all skill levels from beginner to advanced.

The Museum Craft Shop carries a wide range of books along with the specialised fabric, tread, needles and patterns required. The shop also showcases a wide range of local crafts from the Laois area, where customers can see first hand the quality and diversity of the local crafts people, all of which are available for sale.

You can also commission a piece of Mountmellick Embroidery through the Museum.



For further information contact Mountmellick Museum call 057 8624525, see www.mountmellickdevelopment.com, email: themuse@mdaltd.ie or visit Facebook page.



Luan Gallery event listing...

APRIL

New Gallery
TOM FITZ
Closes Sunday 25 April

River Gallery
TIM MANN
Closes Sunday 25 April

Library Gallery
GARY ROBINSON
Closes Sunday 25 April

MAY

New Gallery
CATHERINA HEARNE
Opens Fri 2 May

River Gallery
NAOMI VONA
Opens Fri 2 May

Library Gallery
SEAN GUINAN
Opens Fri 2 May

JUNE

New Gallery
CATHERINA HEARNE
Closes Sunday 29 June

River Gallery
NAOMI VONA
Closes Sunday 29 June

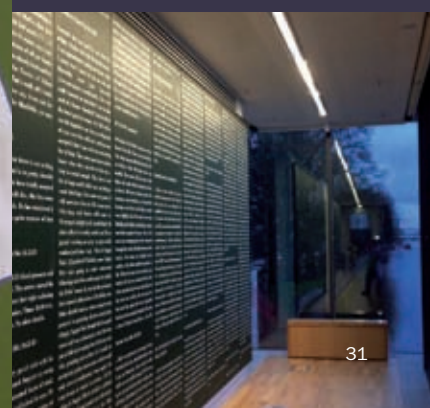
Library Gallery
SEAN GUINAN
Closes Sunday 29 June

JULY

New Gallery
NILAND COLLECTION
Open Friday 4 July

River Gallery
NILAND COLLECTION
Opens Friday 4 July

Library Gallery
NILAND COLLECTION
Opens Friday 4 July



The Delamine String Quartet: l-r Robert Pierce 'Cello, Elaine Rice, violin, Vanessa Sweeney, viola, Philip Dodd, violin. The Quartet has studied with the Vanburgh String Quartet and attended master classes with the Medici and Alberni Quartets. The Quartet performs a range of works, primarily from the classical and romantic period.



Midsummer Music at the Mill

Offaly-based architect **Emmet Scanlon** writes of music, celebrating the poetry of FR Higgins, stained glass windows and Fancroft Mill.

Local effort, community spirit and people passionate about the place in which they live, have been key to sustaining the built and natural landscape in Ireland. An exciting new project to restore the Joshua Clarke-made stained glass windows in Lockeen Church, just five minutes outside Birr proves this, as the project has become a collective focus for a variety of individuals each determined the windows survive.

The project is reinforcing Fancroft Mill and gardens, situated just 20km east

of Lockeen, as an emerging venue for the arts in Offaly. In July 2013, Fancroft hosted the Martello Piano trio in an evening concert to raise funds for Roscrea Hospice playing piano works by Beethoven and Debussy. Now in June 2014, Fancroft will host an evening of music and poetry, with proceeds going towards the restoration of the Lockeen windows.

Marcus and Irene Sweeney who moved to Fancroft in 2006, know a thing or two about restoration. They have worked tirelessly and with great commitment to restore dignity to the mill and to sustain the beautiful gardens. In 2010, with the help of specialist German craftsmen a new set of millstones were installed and the mill became fully functional for the first time in 60 years. Visits are now

possible by arrangement to both the gardens and the mill, where you can see the mill working and marvel at the exquisite timber joinery.

Seminars on the Quaker history of the mill took place in both 2012 and 2013, and the mill has been a participating venue in the national Culture Night initiative.

Indeed the mill building lends itself to being a venue for an arts audience, either upstairs or down, with a stroll through the elegant and fragrant summer gardens providing an idyllic preparation, setting and background to the music played or words spoken.

The June concert should suit the venue perfectly when the Delmaine String Quartet will play music by Haydn and Dvorak,

interwoven with the poetry of FR Higgins, read by actor Michael James Ford. Intended to celebrate the recent revival of the poetry of Higgins as a result of the publication of a new collection of his poems, (*Father and Son – The Selected Poems of FR Higgins* is published 2013 by Arlen House) the string-voice quintet will perform again the next day at Higginsbrook House in county Meath, the former home of this remarkable Irish poet. Proceeds for that concert will go to An Taisce.

FR Higgins is the grand uncle of Philip Dodd, the leader of the Delmaine quartet. Dodd spends half of his life just a few minutes stroll from Lockeen, falling in love with Offaly in 2004 and spending as much time as he can there ever since. Talking with neighbours Hazel Perdue and Peter Whyte a plan to work to restore the windows evolved and indeed to hold a concert in their honour, in parallel restoring the work of Higgins, whose work has not been performed aloud in some years.

Joshua Clarke (c1868–1921), who made the windows, was the father of the better-known Harry Clarke. The windows are tall and slender depicting winding rose coloured passion-flowers, twisting their tightly sprung tendrils, and climbing the branch of a tree. Dodd brought the project to the Sweeneys – he had led the Martello trio in the concert at Fancroft in 2013 – and given the floral subject matter of the windows and the success of the venue, another concert at Fancroft was planned.

Local effort, community spirit and people passionate about the place in which they live, have been key to sustaining the built and natural landscape in Ireland – with Fancroft, we are reminded that these things clearly play a significant role in supporting and sustaining the arts too.

M

Midsummer at the Mill will take place at Fancroft Mill and Gardens on the evening of **June 21, 2014. Booking essential. For further information and to book contact Marcus and Irene Sweeney on 0505 31484 or millgardens@gmail.com. www.fancroft.ie**

Scanlon is currently leading a study of Daingean town and its landscape with March students from the School of Architecture, University College Dublin.

Helium

Children's Art and Health organisation leads the way

Teenage patients across the country are taking part in Cloudlands, the first arts and technology project in Irish hospitals designed especially for young people aged 12–18 years by arts and health organisation Helium.

Cloudlands is a creative project for adolescents who have to spend long periods of time in hospital, often in wards with much younger children and with little in the way of creative stimulation.

Adolescents are collaborating with professional artists to develop new artworks based on their ideas, interests and experiences using the visual arts, storytelling, puppetry, photography, film-making and animation. The project encourages self-expression and social interaction, and helps participants to regain a sense of control and choice over their lives.

A unique aspect of the project is the use of technology to involve teenagers in isolation units who are unable to interact with their peers due to the risk of infection. Helium has developed a secure online platform where teenagers can share their work and collaborate across hospitals.

Westmeath-based Helium, an arts and health organisation dedicated to the wellbeing of young people in Irish healthcare



settings launched the Cloudlands project in November 2012 and will continue until July 2015.

Now in its second year, the project is funded by BNP Paribas' Smart Start Foundation, The Arts Council, Dublin City Council, The Community Foundation for Ireland and Galway University Hospital Arts Trust. **M**

See www.helium.ie or find Helium Children's Arts and Health on Facebook.

To order a copy of *Colours of Life* email rachelatynan@gmail.com or visit Jenny's Kitchen, Tullamore; Midlands Books Tullamore or Balcony Books Tullamore.

DREAMS

by Mary Bracken

A lovely way to spend time
Sweets become gold
Impossibilities become realities
Wishes become real
Everything is possible
Live you're deepest, deepest
Desire for a few hours
This is what dreams are made of

"I clock the biggest lad and that's fine! When I started first I responded to every heckle, whereas now I'm a bit more professional as I'm the one with the microphone"

NEIL DELAMERE

SMART BOMB TOUR

by Ann Marie Kelly

Because of my own height, it's always nice to meet a famous person who's nearly as small as you are. There he was, standing in the foyer of the Heritage Hotel, Portlaoise when I realised I had met him before. A familiar face and a warm smile. He fits right in with the guy you could have gone to school with but didn't.

Neil Delamere is from the midlands – an Edenderry man who still visits as often as he can. No stranger to travel, (his last documentary *There's something about Patrick* saw him travel the length and breadth of Ireland in search of the truth about St Patrick) you could say he is Ireland's busiest comedian both on and off-screen. He works with RTÉ and BBC in programmes such as *The Panel* and *The Blame Game* and also features as a guest radio presenter on RTÉ Radio 1 and Today FM.

So, where does he get time for stand-up?

"Being on stage is my first love," he says but admits he loves the great sense of camaraderie that surrounds the panel shows. "It's like a football team. You get to know how people work, their cadences and their tones." His favourite

panel partner is Colm Murphy who he has worked with on *The Panel* and *The Blame Game* and they call each other 'comedy wives'.

He enjoys playing the young culchie on panel shows, he says, but the hard graft is actually sitting down and writing stand-up.

Delamere explains that, though he has yet to write his show for the Edinburgh Fringe Festival this August, it had to be given its title for the listings in March. And, so, given that he had to provide a title before he had written the actual show he named it *Smartbomb*!

Smartbomb is all about the run-ins he has had with six different people (including a taxi driver, a nurse and the person who renovated his house). I'm intrigued as to why he didn't like the nurse, but he quickly points out he has no problems with nurses, just the one particular nurse who was overworked and told him when he asked to see his grandmother, "No your Granny will be radioactive for a couple of hours".

Smartbomb, he says, is going back to his previous tours before he used props.

It goes right back to basics which is what he loves and says, "keeps him on his toes". The show will see him interact with the audience.

Delamere believes he attracts a certain kind of person to his shows, recalling one particular audience member who was a paramedic in Carlow.

"This guy" he explains, "had to pull a plastic bag out of a man's arse". He got a great kick out of this guy because he could keep coming back to him throughout the show asking him, "had he paid the plastic bag levy?" and "was it a Tesco bag?" and so on. He thinks audiences remember these people and incidents as opposed to the show itself.

He speaks fondly of PJ Kavanagh's in Portlaoise where he loves trialling his new gags and sketches in their early stages as he thinks it's like "comedy in the war, where you're in thick of it and what won't work there, will not work on a big stage". He can analyse and learn it at the same time, he says and it's where he hones and crafts his sketches.

And how does he respond to hecklers? "With a hammer!" he says. "I clock the

biggest lad and that's fine! When I started first I responded to every heckle, whereas now I'm a bit more professional as I'm the one with the microphone," he says.

He comes back to his hometown of Edenderry a lot where his dad is a perennial source of amusement for him. He speaks fondly of one of the finest heckles he ever got when he wasn't actually on a stage but was walking through an audience after doing a gig for the Lions Club in Edenderry. "This man shouted up 'you know your dad is funnier than you'll ever be'. But he's right," says a giggling Delamere.

He uses plenty of characters from Edenderry in his sketches and that's why it's a pleasure doing gigs in Tullamore and Portlaoise coming back from being abroad, he explains. "You've all had the same experiences, you'll have all been in the same nightclubs, and you've all celebrated your Junior and Leaving Cert all the same way and if you're winging something in particular the references are just there. You can do something about O'Moore Park, Richie Kavanagh or Joe Dolan. And of course we all the love the familiar." **M**

Eileen Casey
writes on the allure
of tea in her poetry
and finding herself
published in the
America poetry
journal, *Jelly Bucket*.



Tea haiku's
*Snowflakes falling fresh
Infusing scented mornings
My father's eyebrow*

*Pathways broadening
Thin twigs crackle underfoot
Man running, airborne*

*It comes into view
Floats on tides of porcelain
A ship in full sail*

*Sepia shadings
Billowing on the world's rim
Leaf on leaf on leaf*

*Elephant roses
Ivories boned on petals
Trunk up, lifting sky*

small landscapes

at the bottom of the tea cup

"In 2009, I was given the gift of Iranian tea leaves by my great friend Sam Tavakoli who lives in Lisburn. I immediately was drawn to the images which emerged at the bottom of my teacup. I called them 'small landscapes,' and they had huge creative potential as far as I was concerned. Since that time, I've faithfully recorded my tealeaf images and have written a number of poems/haiku.

In May, 2013, I facilitated a Grundtvig Seminar in Odense, Denmark. My tea presentation was well received and recognised as having lots of potential. What I set out to do is to create the space to explore story in its many shapes and forms. What better way to bring characters to life than through this familiar and much loved ritual.

Literature and tea fit together as easily as cup and saucer – Lewis Carol's

Alice in Wonderland, or Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* being prime examples. In visual art, Mary Cassatt's impressionistic *The Cup of Tea* represents a social custom that Cassatt revisited many times in her paintings.

George Orwell's essay, *A Nice Cup of Tea*, (Evening Standard, 1946) sets forth his views on the drinking of tea and which particular flavours to buy; "One should use Indian or Ceylonese tea. China tea has virtues which are not to be despised nowadays – it is economical, and one can drink it without milk – but there is not much stimulation in it." For Orwell, "a nice cup of tea," invariably means Indian tea.

I sent my tealeaf images to lots of outlets in Ireland, each time they were rejected, but still believing in the power of tea I was at last rewarded. I sent them to

America, to the Eastern Kentucky University Press and received in the post the other day, the most beautiful journal with my little 'masterpieces' over a two page spread in *Jelly Bucket*. What's the point? Never give up on your artistic vision.

You can never get a cup of tea large enough or a book long enough to suit me. CS Lewis **M**

Eileen Casey is a poet, fiction writer and journalist. She facilitates creative writing classes for adults. *Drinking the Colour Blue* (New Island Poetry) and *Snow Shoes* (Arlen House Fiction) are two of her collections. Two of her poems are featured in The City of Literature One City/One Book choice for 2014, *If Every You Go*, (Dedalus Press). These poems are rooted in The Midlands. She received a Hennessy Literary Award (Emerging Fiction), 2010 and a Katherine and Patrick Kavanagh Fellowship in 2011.

Patricia Hurl reflects
on the practice of
Lynne Hoare and
urges the recognition
of her work.



In August of 2013, Lynne Hoare's exhibition '*Structures of Devotion at the Amuseoleum*' was shown in Birr, Co. Offaly. This was commissioned by Birr Theatre and Arts Centre to take place during Birr Vintage Week & Arts Festival.

Lynne chose to exhibit in John's Hall, a miniature Greek ionic temple which was built in the early 1800's by the second Earl of Rosse, in memory of his son. It sits in the middle of John's Mall, a splendid streetscape lined by Georgian Houses. The opening was held, somewhat appropriately, on a Sunday. It was thronged with visitors and we had to inch our way around, brushing against huge constructions made from Lynn's collection of old letters, posters, newspapers and textiles. Interior spaces made of wood, wire, tin boxes and sundry intriguing items lining every inch of the space. Lynn led the procession, wearing a calico studio coat, reputedly once worn by Picasso. Her carefully considered placement of the objects gave an order and ritualistic dimension to this work, imbuing it with a sense of being in a spiritual place, which seemed perfectly fitting for this beautiful Hall.

Work from Middle

Shows There's More to the Midlands Than Meets the Eye

"Often perceived as a wearily protracted obstacle between Dublin and the west; in the days before motorways, a slow ticking off of dull little towns on a lot of flatland drained by sluggish rivers; more lately a whizz between video-game verges, with nowhere in sight to pee." Michael Viney, the Irish Times, Saturday May 18, 2013. From his weekly column entitled, *Another Life*, article entitled, *Laois and Offaly, I take it all back*.

The theme for an article by Columnist, Michael Viney, inspired *Work from Middle* entitled, *Laois and Offaly, I take it all back*. It refers to a publication, *The Geology of Laois and Offaly*, which is the culmination of a lifetime research undertaken by Dr John Feehan, on the broader cultural heritage of Laois and Offaly.

A feature of the book is the six specially commissioned paintings illustrating different periods in the geological evolution of Laois and Offaly, by Offaly-based artist Jock Nichol.

"A Sense of Place, interests me greatly. When I read the opening lines to the article by Michael Viney, from his weekly weekend Irish Times column, it made me question the varying clichés and viewpoints held on the Midlands of Ireland," says Muireann Ní Chonaill, Arts Officer of Laois County Council who is the Curator for this exhibition. She adds that there is more to the Midlands than meets the eye - apart from the varying landscape, the highlands, lowlands, peaks, water, flowing and still, this place is enriched by its people. It is what makes the place unique.

Work from Middle is on view in the Laois Arthouse Gallery.

The Laois Arthouse comprises of Studios, Apartments, an Exhibition Space, Rehearsal Space, Kiln, Garden, digital facilities and a public library. An Artists-in-Residence scheme is funded through the Department of the Environment, Per Cent for Art Scheme.

Artists involved are Eoin Ó Conaill, Jock Nichol, Ken Wardrop, Lisa Fingleton, Saidhbhín Gibson, Simon Burch and Vera McEvoy. **M**

Laois Art House, Strabally, presents Work from the Middle which runs from February 27 to March 20. The exhibition is open from 1-4pm daily but can be viewed outside these hours by special request. Further details can be found by contacting the Laois Arts Officer. Picture title is Pat Cloghan from artist Eoin O'Conaill.



structures of devotion and other stories...



I first encountered Lynne's art some years ago when she participated in an Arts in Context project in Ennistymon, placing her intriguing found collection of abandoned dolls in a disused shop window.

When we met six years ago after I had come to live in the Midlands, I found her to be the personification of what I had imagined. She is one of life's true artists – a collector-gatherer of the detritus of our lives, transforming the unwanted, the forgotten, neglected 'stuff', which define us as much as the castles and gravestones we construct to prove our existence.

For the past six years Lynn has harnessed her ferocious appetite for making art into a series of installations in a disused shop window in Birr, and more recently in Tullamore. She delivers her environmental, social and personal beliefs in the form of montages, collages and constructions, often containing puzzles, anagrams or limericks, often with wicked humour. Sometimes she puts her considerable talent for painting to good effect. Is this to baffle us, I wonder?

These interventions are recreated every month without a word of encouragement from the general public most of whom, to my knowledge, never realised that an artist had created new exciting (if

sometimes difficult) work in their town.

'What keeps you going', I asked her, "I love what I am doing" she replied, as a matter of fact. No more stupid questions then, when I met her in her home/studio last April during a period of high energy when she was preparing for her new exhibition.

Lynne lives in a very remote part of Co. Offaly in a beautiful old Georgian pile, which has become her home/studio and the container in which she keeps her vast collection of artifacts and found / abandoned objects. We had coffee in her kitchen that had become a 'pop-up' studio, threatening to engulf the place, with only the cooking and eating areas visible. This dis-order is very deceptive however, as Lynne has a handle on everything within this chaos. The making order from all that surrounds her is the rewarding part of the work. She says 'I have no problem in thinking about ideas or concepts, on the contrary, I have trouble trying to sort out the crowded and overflowing stream of thoughts in my mind'.

This latest body of work is a trajectory of her everyday life/art practice. "I am looking at the history of Shrines and Structures of Devotion... over the years thoughts and ideas come to me and don't get done. This exhibition gives me the opportunity to have them realized, the bits and bobs purloined from around the house."

When I ask her to give me a sentence which would illustrate her practice she replied immediately, "my work has an undercurrent of environmental concerns, flowing around the foibles of human nature."

She tells me that she collects objects for their social history, items that have been discarded or abandoned, often architectural scraps and some quite literally from the trash. There is usually some degree of modification in the process, although not to the extent that the object/s cannot be recognized. Lynn's task then is to present her work in some way that provides an authentic context to the newly emerged form.

She showed me her collection of charred wood, rusty nails, spills made from old lime-plastered laths, old tobacco tins, air fresheners, betting slips, parking tickets, foraged treads of stairs all awaiting to be transformed into Altars/Shrines/Grottos.

I noticed, in particular, one piece in which

laths were crudely nailed to the base of a drawer "recalling penitent's self-abuse", she explained, not too seriously. At that time, Lynne had an enormous task in hand, planning to fill John's Hall, a large somewhat gloomy space and furnished with tall, uncompromisingly awful, mdf presses.

I did not believe that it would be possible to coherently present this entire jumble of objects in a comparatively short space of time, with little funding or technical help... but amazingly and with great authority and skill, Lynne made it happen. The results were mindboggling. I loved the sheer chutzpah, energy, exhilaration of it all. Which of us can ever forget her 'Witches Knickers', an installation of shredded black paper bags, rescued from hedges and ditches and rehung wildly in the trees in front of John's Hall.

This is an exhibition made specifically for this location and I'm not sure if it would travel elsewhere with the same power. It reinforces my thoughts on the great urban/rural divide. Lynne's exhibition should have been seen, in location, by art lovers, critics and journalists.

There was no presence of anyone from the national, or indeed, international papers. More has to be done, by ourselves, to make things happen. I believe when people hear and read, through the media, about art such as "Structures of Devotion at the Amuseoleum" they will travel to see the work in the context for which it was imagined and created.

While visiting the Biennale in Venice last October, I bumped (literally) into John Outterbridge's installation. He is an 89 year old African – American, whose life's work has only been recognized internationally in the past few years. I had a déjà vu moment, his practice was the personification of Lynne's work.

We should try to ensure that Lynn does not have such a long wait.





Waterways Ireland, in partnership with Fáilte Ireland and the Midland Regional Authority, under the Lakelands & Inland Waterways banner, has launched a free Lakeland Treasures app for the iPhone.

Established as a pilot, it is the intention to extend the Lakeland Treasures app to include over 100 heritage attractions across the region.

A photo treasure hunt, Lakeland Treasures is a family fun way to explore some of the Midlands best known heritage attractions including Abbeyshrule Abbey, Ardagh Heritage Village, Athlone Castle, Belvedere House, Birr Castle, Clonmacnoise, Emo Court and Timahoe.

The app links to places to eat, stay, and other attractions by closest proximity.

Lakeland Treasures is free to download from the app store.



Pictured at the launch of the Lakelands Treasures App Launch in Belvedere House, Gardens & Park, Mullingar, Back row L-R: Mairead NiChongaille, Longford Heritage Officer; Colm Breheny, Failte Ireland; Amanda Pedlow, Offaly Heritage Officer; Cllr Larry Bannon, MRA; Eanna Rowe, Waterways Ireland; Bernadette Solan, Westmeath Heritage Officer; Cllr Fintan Cooney, MRA; Pat Murtagh, Roscommon County Council. Front row left to right: Catherine Casey, Laois Heritage Officer; Cllr John Bonham, Cathaoirleach, MRA; Katrina McGirr, Waterways Ireland; James Bannon, TD; Ruth McNally, Director, Midland Regional Authority.



DUNAMAISE ARTS CENTRE CELEBRATES 15 YEARS

Dunamaisé Arts Centre Portlaoise celebrates its 15th anniversary in 2014. Since 1999, the purpose-built 240-seat theatre and cinema, gallery, café and workshop spaces, located within the old courthouse buildings in the centre of Portlaoise town, has welcomed over a quarter of a million patrons.

Actor Robert Sheehan (Misfits, Love/Hate, City of Bones) is an Ambassador for Dunamaisé. Originally from Portlaoise, Sheehan began acting on the Dunamaisé stage and now has an international career, IFTA and BAFTA awards nominations and shares a BAFTA Award with the cast of Misfits. He recently presented his infamous blue hooded top as worn by his character Darren in the award-winning series Love/Hate, which will be on display at Dunamaisé Arts Centre.

Some of the biggest names in performing and visual arts have shared their talents at the centre including The Chieftains; Irish & International orchestras; American singer-songwriter Josh Ritter; award-

winning theatre companies such as Druid, Rough Magic, Livin Dred, The Abbey and The Gate Theatre. It has also showcased live screenings from The Metropolitan Opera House in New York.

The impressive programme of gallery exhibitions includes collaborations with the OPW, IMMA, Abbeylisc VEC and Portlaoise Prison as well as solo shows by artists as diverse as Mick O'Dea, Robert Ballagh, Tony O'Malley, David King, Pat Moran, Bernadette Madden and Ulrich Vogl.

A Sponsor a Seat fundraising campaign will also be run as part of the anniversary celebrations, to ensure the venue's success long into the future.

As a registered charity and only part funded by The Arts Council and Laois County Council, Dunamaisé relies upon the highly supportive and arts-engaged local community for the supplementary fundraising support required – and even more so in 2014 given the fact it faced

an 8 per cent cut in funding from The Arts Council.

Patrons are now invited to play a lead role in ensuring a bright future for the arts venue by naming a seat for themselves, a family member, a business or a group. For €100, seat sponsors are entitled to:

Inclusion of an individual's, a family, group or company name/logo on a specially printed seating plan, prominently displayed in Dunamaisé Arts Centre Foyer/Box Office a listing as a seat sponsor on www.dunamaisie.ie a gift of a commemorative certificate an exclusive invitation to a Sponsors' Celebration of Dunamaisé 15th Anniversary

To sponsor a seat, contact the box office on 057 8663355 or to check out the anniversary festivities see www.dunamaisie.ie



MidlandsArts andCultureMagazine

A REVIEW OF THE ARTS IN LAOIS, LONGFORD OFFALY AND WESTMEATH

