

Midlands Arts and Culture Magazine

A REVIEW OF THE ARTS IN LAOIS, LONGFORD, OFFALY AND WESTMEATH **WINTER 2011/12** **16**

ISSUE

16

VISUAL ARTS
MUSIC & DANCE
THEATRE & FILM
THE WRITTEN WORD

FREE



Honeycomb Project

Lights up Electric Picnic

MAN-I-PULATE

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Athlone Artists' Studios Open

Belinda McKeown

Wise Beyond her Years

Banging on

with Drum Circle Facilitator Eddie O'Neill

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A Word from the Editor



What is becoming ever more apparent is the battle that the Arts has on its hands. While, on the face of it, for some, the Arts may seem like an obvious and easy casualty of recessionary

times the fact is that the Arts are bucking the trend and making a valuable economic contribution during the downturn!

While I am a firm believer that arts for arts sake is sufficient to support and nurture the Arts it is increasingly clear that arts is certainly not for arts sake alone – it is for health, recreational, community, economic, tourism and employment sakes also.

Let's take a look at just a few of the startling economic figures demonstrating the impact the Arts makes on the Midlands and on our country:

The total of direct, indirect and induced employment in Arts Council funded organisations and the wider arts sector is in the region of 26,519.

The total of direct, indirect and induced employment supported by the arts and creative industries is some 95,649 jobs. Total Exchequer expenditure on the cultural and creative sector in 2008 was €330 million. Direct Exchequer revenue from the cultural and creative sectors in 2008 was approximately €1 billion.

Of the €76 million that was used to fund arts organisations and individuals across Ireland in 2007, €54 million was returned directly to the Exchequer in the form of income, VAT and other taxes.

The Irish Film Board invested €17 million in 36 films, TV and animation productions in 2008 that resulted in an incredible €80 million expenditure in Irish economy.

It is also interesting to note that while there has been much concern over dropping numbers of visitors to Ireland Cultural Tourism is the only growth area of the tourism market and is worth more than €2 billion to the economy. Some 30,000 people attend festivals in Offaly, Laois and Westmeath alone.

These are facts and may well be a surprise to some. With these startling numbers in mind let's do what we can to promote the Arts by demonstrating what it contributes to our well-being – monetary and otherwise – and ensure that funding, at the very, very least, remains at current levels. To cut Arts funding further is really like 'cutting off your nose to spite your face'.

To discover just what a valuable contribution the Arts make to our society check out the National Campaign for the Arts on www.nca.ie

YOUR LOCAL ARTS OFFICERS



County Offaly
WHO: Sinead O'Reilly,
WHERE: Offaly County Council,
Charleville Road, Tullamore
CONTACT: Telephone 057 9357400
soreilly@offalycoco.ie
www.offaly.ie/arts



County Westmeath
WHO: Catherine Kelly
WHERE: Westmeath County Council
County Buildings, Mullingar
CONTACT: Telephone 044 9332140
ckelly@westmeathcoco.ie
www.westmeathcoco.ie/arts



County Laois
WHO: Muireann Ní Chonail
WHERE: Laois County Council,
Portlaoise, Co Laois
CONTACT: Tel: 057 8674342/44
mnichonail@laoiscoco.ie
www.laois.ie/arts



County Longford
WHO: Fergus Kennedy
WHERE: Longford County Council,
Great Water St. Longford.
CONTACT: Tel: 043 3346231
fkennedy@longfordcoco.ie
www.longfordcoco.ie/arts_office.html

Laois Year of Craft 2011

Laois has been celebrating National Year of Craft in style and to mark this very significant year the Laois Year of Craft Committee has created an exciting and diverse range of events for the last quarter of 2011.

From exhibitions to demonstrations, workshops to talks, children's events to film screenings the county of Laois will be a crafty hive of activity for the final quarter of the year.

Award winning basket maker Joe Hogan brought his stunning traditional and contemporary baskets to a month long exhibition hosted by the Dunamais Arts Centre until October 1. Local basket maker Martin Sinnott even gave a workshop at the arts centre.

Abbeyleix library plays host to an exhibition of some of the country's finest craft makers including wood turner David Comerford, textile artist Maeve Coulter, jeweller Helena Malone and ceramicist Edyta Szymanska. Hailing from Laois and neighbouring county Kilkenny each maker will exhibit a body of work that truly reflects the diversity and quality of craft work being produced by craft makers in our immediate environs.

Master craftsman Roger Bennett who has exhibited and taught all over the world made a very welcome return to this native county Laois to give a demonstration in woodturning at Stradbally Library.

At the heart of the programme of events is craft for children. To encourage participation and appreciation of craft amongst young people the Laois Year of Craft Committee has initiated a whole series of craft workshops in various schools throughout the county. The fruits of these workshops will be shown in a young person's exhibition in the new children's gallery in Dunamais called The Drawing Room from December 9. This exhibition will accompany the Dunamais Arts Centre's own curated craft exhibition called Pop up Collection and running from December 9 – January 14, 2012 the exhibition will turn into a pop up shop where all exhibited items will be for sale.

Mountmellick Embroidery is a central part of the Laois craft industry. A craft that has achieved both national and international renown its significance was recognised in the 1970s by the

creator of the multi award winning RTÉ Hands series, David Shaw Smith, in his episode on Irish embroidery. David will give a talk before a public showing of this Hands episode on December 8 at 11am in the Dunamais Arts Centre. Joining David on the day to give a demonstration in Mountmellick embroidery will be Dolores Bracken, a long standing Mountmellick embroidery teacher.

Laois Partnership and Laois County Enterprise Board will also run training courses over the next few months dedicated to the craft sector.

Further details can be found in the Laois Year of Craft Autumn and Winter Schedule brochure. **M**

For further information contact:

Marina Rafter, Laois Year of Craft Co-ordinator on **086 869 8996** or email marinarafter@gmail.com or see www.laoiscrafts.com



CRAFTING A PLAN: Laois Year of Craft Committee

Briefs

ATHLONE LITERARY FESTIVAL 2011 PROVES A BEST SELLER

Athlone's Literary Festival in October featured diverse events such as a creative writing workshop with Big Smoke Writing Factory, discussions with poet Gabriel Rosenstock and writer Nuala Ni Conchuir and even an interview with Ruth Dudley Edwards, comic strips, poetry, music or true-life stories, Athlone Literary Festival had something for everyone.

The opening event of the festival was a discussion between former Mountjoy Prison Governor John Loneragan, Mrs Justice Catherine McGuinness and well-known communications lecturer and newly appointed Senator, Marie-Louise O'Donnell. The discussion focused on John Loneragan's book *The Governor* – a book which shows a man with a humane and progressive outlook who often found himself regarded as a maverick and at odds with bureaucracy.

The festival also included a workshop on publishing with Jo O'Donoghue of Londubh Books which examined all aspects of publishing from traditional methods to online publishing.

Also on the agenda was a discussion on how landscape affects writing with writer Nuala Ni Conchuir and poet Gabriel Rosenstock. Nuala has won many short fiction prizes including the Cúirt New Writing Prize, RTÉ radio's Francis MacManus Award and the Cecil Day Lewis Award. She was joined in this discussion by poet Gabriel Rosenstock who has written or translated over 100 books.

This year's festival featured a number of events for younger people and it continued to provide a platform for up and coming writers and artists. A Teddy Bear's Picnic in Athlone Library, a writing workshop for young people and a how to draw a comic strip workshop all attracted interest.

Offaly County Council's *Out the Clara Road: the Offaly Anthology*, edited by Rita Ann Higgins in 1999, the title of which came from one of my poems.

"Since I started writing poetry in the mid-nineties in New York, I could count on one hand the poems I've written about America. Like McGahern with his Leitrim, I've mined the seams of my childhood experiences in Offaly and Westmeath for years now. In 1983 I left Ireland to escape my past; 28 years later, it's still nipping at my ankles begging for my attention." **M**



County Offaly native **CONNIE ROBERTS** who emigrated to the United States in 1983 is set to receive a major accolade in the States in December.

Top Award for Offaly Native

Connie who now teaches creative writing at Hofstra University, New York is also part of Hofstra's Irish Studies Program. In September, 2011 she was selected as a recipient of the prestigious George M Estabrook Distinguished Service Award at Hofstra University and will receive her award at the 51st Annual Investiture Luncheon at the Hofstra University Club on December 4, 2011.

Connie's work as a writer has always receiving much international acclaim having been nominated for the Hennessy XO Literary Award in 2009 and winning the Patrick Kavanagh Poetry Award for *Not the Delft School*, a collection of poetry inspired by her experiences growing up in an industrial school in County Westmeath.

Her poetry has been published in journals in the United States and Ireland, including *The Recorder: The Journal of the American Irish Historical Society*, *Irish Pages*, *The Irish Times* and *THE SHOP*.

She was also a finalist in the Strokestown International Poetry Competition in 2001 and the Dana Awards in 2003.

In 2010 Connie was awarded a space in the Poetry Ireland Introductions Series and she also won first prize in the Dromineer Literary Festival Poetry Competition.

And, this past spring, she received a Literature Bursary Award from the Irish Arts Council.

"In many ways, it is fitting that my first published work appeared in the

Annual Aisling Children's Arts Festival

While September 2011 marked the return to school, it also meant that the 14th Annual Aisling Children's Arts Festival kicked off. The festival saw the return of an exciting week of theatre, art projects, inter-active workshops and general good times for the children of Longford.



Following on from the success of previous years, the Aisling festival was delighted to once again have Chris Thompson and Doug Fox Roberts on board to help with the 321 project. Students from Kilasonna, St Mary's School, and Edgeworthstown National School wrote and produced their own play which was then performed at the Backstage Theatre. This performance of the children's play was one of the highlights of the festival.

The Aisling Festival wouldn't be complete without a photography project. Renowned local photographer, Shelley Corcoran joined the festival to teach students from Killoe and Whitehall National Schools the art of photography. She helped them create their own photography exhibition which was displayed during the festival in the Atrium Gallery.

The festival concluded with a day of workshops in the Temperance Hall where children from the ages of four to 14 could participate in a variety of workshops, ranging from a drum and percussion circle, to a fairy wing workshop, and even a pottery class which had real pottery wheels on which the children could practice their craft.

Finally, the festival could not take place without the generous sponsorship of local businesses and organisations. Despite the difficult economic times, regular sponsors continued to offer their support. **M**

For further information see www.aislingfestival.ie.

The festival was launched on October 13, in the Longford Arms Hotel and included music and entertainment with the winners of this year's Art Competition also announced.

The festival kicked off as usual with the popular free Family Fun Day. Among the many activities taking place, the day included circus-acts workshops, a climbing wall, an interactive animal display, and live music and entertainment for the enjoyment of children and adults of all ages.

As well as usual fun-filled activities, the Aisling Festival was particularly excited this year to host a very special project featuring the work of renowned Longford writer Padraig Colum. A performance from his book *The King of Ireland's Son* was successfully adapted for the stage by youths from the Attic Youth Café and the Backstage Youth Theatre Group. The performance was directed by renowned theatre director Padraig McIntyre and was turned into a video project by local video practitioner Shane Crossan. The participating youths performed their piece at the Backstage at the end of October.



IN A WHIRL: Photo of dance artist Trajal Harrell (New York)

I.F. O.N.L.Y. Takes Centre Stage in Offaly

The International Festival of a Necessarily Lonely You

Now in its fourth year, the only dance festival dedicated to solo dance in Ireland, IF ONLY, yet again proved to be full of great artists, workshops and incredible evening performances.

The weekend in September started with an artist's talk and a tea dance for active elderly in the Birr Public Library, while the afternoon was full of dance workshops for all ages in different venues across town.

On Saturday night Birr joined the Mamuska Nights network (after Dublin, Tokyo, Helsinki, Kerry, Limerick and Leeds) and became the setting for Mamuska Night!

What is Mamuska? Well, Mamuska is a social event, a time to experiment, a chance to be inspired, an artistic risk and of course a fun night out. In a café-style setting attendees were able to relax, drink a glass of wine, chat, listen to live DJ and watch a rich programme of short live performances of various styles and genres. It

also proved to be an occasion to present raw ideas, unrehearsed visions, short masterpieces and playful nonsense.

On Sunday, after more dance classes and workshops, the main programme of the festival took to the stage with high calibre artists including Trajal Harrell (New York City), Liv O'Donoghue (Ireland) and Madalina Dan (Rome) amongst others. This was an incredible opportunity to see dance in its pure and most direct form and to be surprised by the incredible beauty, enchanting atmosphere and provoking twists of the wonderful dance artists. **M**



Foolish Pride needs no Persuasion of Interest



This summer, record crowds attended the official launch of Foolish Pride, a contemporary Austen-esque novel by Longford author Anne Skelly.

Originally from Dublin, Anne moved to the midlands in 1999 and she and her husband Mike now live near Abbeyshrule, Co Longford and it's there where much of the inspiration comes from.

"It's been about four years in the making and is set in contemporary rural Longford," said Anne, speaking about *Foolish Pride*.

The novel, which is loosely based on the Jane Austen classic *Persuasion*, centres around the life of heroine Beth Maguire (34), a single national school teacher living at home with her parents.

"The novel begins 10 years on from her romance with Sam Butler. It was a relationship that broke up because of pressure from parents and the community," said Anne. "There is now pressure on her to fulfil society's expectations and find a man."

As the plot unfolds a dashing young Scotsman arrives on the scene, taking up a teaching post in Beth's school.

However, nothing is quite what it seems and as the reader moves further into the story they share a

myriad of experiences with their heroine ranging from the joy of an unfolding relationship to the horror and heartbreak of a dark and disastrous breakup.

"The book also looks at the benefits of a close knit community and the support that is there at all times, particularly as Beth moves through various troubles," said Anne. "This is primarily a love story but also a reflection on the way of life of a whole community."

Foolish Pride was published by Book Republic, an imprint of Maverick House Publishing, who have been helpful towards first-time writers, explained Anne.

"Their mission is to encourage first time writers who find it far more difficult to get published by the bigger mainstream publishers. My experience with them has been fantastic," said Anne. "I would like to thank them and also Mary Carleton Reynolds (Longford County Librarian) who supported me so much and was fantastic to me in every way. I would like to thank her for being a wonderful county librarian."

Launch

Well known Leitrim author and creative writer, Brian Leyden launched the book in County Longford Library. Speaking at the launch, he commented on the author's ingenuity at taking an eternally fresh storyline (Jane Austen's *Persuasion*) and making it a memorable modern story.

"When you snap up your copy of *Foolish Pride*, I think the first thing that will strike you is just how well and how clearly Anne writes. While I'd love to take the credit and call her a prodigy of my creative writing workshops, I think the truth is that her intellect always danced to its own tune," said Brian.

"This is a romance firmly set in Anne's home patch in Longford. We have visits to the horse show in Moate... we've the dining room of the Longford Arms Hotel where the local Golden Nib Writers' Group have their gala Christmas dinner with a disco afterwards," said Brian in outlining the geographical context of *Foolish Pride*.

The Leitrim author went on to compliment Anne on her secondary characters and the manner

"It's been about four years in the making and is set in contemporary rural Longford"

said Anne, speaking about *Foolish Pride*.

in which she portrayed the small fictional community of Carrigmore.

"As with Jane Austen, in Anne's *Foolish Pride* the big things are passion and prudence and we understand prudence all the better because like her we understand how gossip travels and how tongues can wag in these small village and town settings," said Brian.

"Snobbish, ambitious and meddlesome mothers do come out rather badly in this story. Misguided notions of rectitude are perhaps the main guiding force of the story. And the mothers especially in *Foolish Pride* habitually look to what is best for themselves rather than what's best in their offspring." **M**

HAVE YOUR SAY

What do you want from The Arts in Offaly?

Offaly County Council is in the process of preparing a new five year Arts plan for Offaly, 2012 to 2016 and the Arts Office has issued an open invitation for people to come forward with their ideas, comments, observations and concerns.

"Much has happened in the Arts in Offaly over the past five years," explained Sinead O'Reilly, Arts Officer. "Apart from new festivals, new arts organisations and an increase in artists in the county, I feel that together we have achieved very strong foundations for the arts to develop even further. Five years ago, apart from a few exceptions, there was generally a lack of confidence in the arts; from certainty in what its potential meant for the county to being confident as a participant."

She went on to say that even though we are in financially troubled times for the arts, there is a belief and a certainty

about what the arts represents, characterises and embodies in communal and individual identities.

"I have seen firsthand how the arts can have an extraordinary effect on ordinary people. The challenge is now to see how we can take this one step further in ways that are even more imaginative, more innovative and more meaningful.

"The new Arts Plan when adopted by Offaly County Council will be our mandate for the next five years, so it is important that everyone feels welcome to have a say. We will be taking submissions by email or in writing up to the end of January 2012; there will also be opportunities for further consultations and discussions before the final plan is adopted later in the year." **M**

Submissions to be considered for Offaly's next Arts Plan can be emailed to arts@offalycoco.ie or posted to **Arts Office, Offaly County Council, Charleville Road, Tullamore, County Offaly.**

Laois County Council
Comhairle Chontae Laoise



THE ARTHOUSE STUDIO AWARD FOR NCAD GRADUATES



Applications are now available for the Arthouse Studio Award for NCAD graduates. For a second year running Laois County Council in association with the National College of Art and Design are offering this award. It is intended to support an emerging artist/

designer to develop their professional practice whilst engaging in a residency project and community context. Applicants must have graduated in the past 3 years from the NCAD.

The Award includes:

- A bursary of €10,000 for the residency project. To be paid in installments.
- A studio with accommodation at a rent of €200 per month or a studio without accommodation for €120 per month for a one-year period (depending on availability of apartment). Light and heat are extra.
- Administrative and curatorial support through Laois County Council Arts Office.
- Inclusion in exhibition programmes with Laois County Council.
- Services offered within the complex include a studio space, exhibition space, rehearsal space, kiln, garden space, a digital room, and library facilities.
- Guest Lecturing opportunity on the subject of the Award in the NCAD.

Closing date for applications Friday January 27 at 5pm

Application forms and further information about the award are available from The Arts Officer, Laois County Council, Telephone 057 8674342/44, website www.laois.ie or email artsoff@laoiscoco.ie



Paul Quast's
Dwelling at the
Making Space
Public Art Event,
Athlone

MAKING SPACE

for Art in Athlone for Everyone

The Making Space Collective took over Athlone Civic Square transforming it into a hub of creative activity earlier this year.

The Making Space Public Art Event 2011 was organised by artist Lorna Kincaid as her final project in completing a Masters in Art, Social Practice and the Creative Environment.

Having returned to Westmeath after her studies she wanted to make art much more accessible in Athlone Town and so The Making Space Public Art Event was organised as an intervention to generate creative possibilities and opportunities that focused on the spaces in Athlone – and resulting in an open conversation for artists and creatives about creativity in the local area.

The Public Art Event challenged the feelings of isolation felt by artists living in small towns and rural areas. By situating art in a public square the traditional places and spaces for art such as the cities and galleries were challenged. Making Space Public Art Event gave local artists and art groups the opportunity to show case their work

and meet other artists – and crucially made art more accessible to a wider audience, and created dialogue between artists and the public.

The Making Space Public Art Event 2011 showcased work by 21 visual artists working in a multitude of disciplines such as performance, dance, sculpture, design, sound and film.

The Civic Square was transformed into a hub of activity where audiences contemplated the work exhibited, met and talked with artists and had the opportunity to participate in workshops. A night time film screening in the Civic Square showcased work by local, national and international artists.

Artist involved were **Lorna Kincaid, Rois Ni Dhochartaigh, Aoife Hegarty Doolan, Rose Finerty, Paul Quast, Veronica Forsgren, Daisy Cleary, Leigh Francis, George Mills, Aishling Muller, Iemeh42, George Beattie, Ciaran Fitzpatrick, Pamela Myers, Chris Flicker, Elaine Hurley, Suzanne Hogan, Fiona White, James Graf, Emer O'Connor and Seamus McCormack.**

ABOUT PAUL QUAST

Local artist Paul Quast who is studying painting and combined media in Limerick School of Art and Design was among the exhibiting artists. His work *Dwelling* challenges society's blind corners, specifically dealing with themes such as waste disposal and consumerism's hold on the modern zeitgeist.

Dwelling is inspired by the waste produced by consumerism as it replaces functioning materials in exchange for newer ones. Using these discarded monetary-less artefacts, Paul aims to show that these materials can still have a value, not as a product but as an artistic comment on the way in which society tells us to live.

ABOUT VERONICA FORSGREN

Dublin based artist and curator Veronica Forsgren's, *Praxinoscope* was also showcased at the event. Forsgren has been exploring mechanical devises linked with animation and early cinema and this piece is a modified version of a Praxinoscope (an early animation devise dating from the late nineteenth century by Emile Reynaud) – an experiment attempting to recreate the spectacle, magic and social experience associated with early cinema.



Veronica
Forsgren's
Praxinoscope

For further information see
www.makingspace.weebly.com



TULLAMORE LIBRARY GETS A FACELIFT

A newly refurbished Central Library for Tullamore is on the way – great news for the people of Tullamore and indeed the library service of Offaly County Council as the provision of an updated Central Library and HQ has been on the cards for some time.

Libraries throughout Offaly are experiencing greater demand for services during recessionary times, with visits to libraries increasing by 16 per cent and internet use dramatically increased by 26 per cent in 2010.

The new design proposal aims to provide a free flowing layout to the library utilising the spaces of the ground floor by creating a large open plan space. A new extension to the front the building will give the library a new face in O'Connor Square and improve the visibility and presence of the library in the town.

To the rear of the building the new extension, which geometrically addresses the river, will increase the overall floor area of the library to provide a larger children's section and a new teenager section in the library. The existing store and prefab to the rear of the library will be demolished allowing for a new landscaped riverside garden to the rear of the library with views of the Tullamore River.

The provision of an enhanced library facility will enable people to combine going to the library with shopping, work and school. The community will be able to enjoy an open plan library with access to a dedicated local history area, a multipurpose ICT/Training space, community meeting areas, study/learning areas and an improved children and teenage space.

The design and equipment of the library will reflect its multi-faceted role in terms of information provision for the whole community and will cater for a variety of means of information dissemination: books, periodicals, compact discs, audio books, mp3s, DVDs, computer learning and internet access. Prime consideration will be given to smart services including self service, quick selection and return, mobile and moveable ICT, wifi, self check out/check in and RFID (Radio frequency identification).

The objective of the proposed extension and refurbishment is to ensure enhanced access for the local community and a greater focus on on-going learning, self-learning, adult literacy and recreational need.

M

together foam board and MDF and using pins which I've stuck into the piece to allow me to create an interesting geometrical pattern by looping and threading coloured cloth thread around the pins and over the surface.

The theme, Constellations, represents different ideas, work, and concepts that I have used in my art practice."

M

Laois Artist Secures Top Festival Accolade

Ann Egan catches up with Gareth Jenkins who has scooped a top accolade after being named Artist Prizewinner for this year's Éigse Carlow Arts Festival Open Submission – and catches himself by surprise.

"I applied to Éigse. I am not the most organised person, I just made the

deadline. I didn't expect to hear anything back from it so I was very surprised to get an email from Visual Carlow explaining I had been successful in my admission for Éigse and there was a paragraph that said I had been awarded Éigse Carlow Arts Festival Open Submission Prize, which was fantastic. It was great to win. It didn't sink in – it hasn't sunk in maybe like most artists, I don't jump for joy!"

The theme of Constellations, was a concept derived by the curator of this year's Éigse, Emma Lucy O'Brien, explained Gareth. "The title of my work for Éigse is Re-Collection which began in a group

project which I took part in called Table of Contents in Limerick School of Art and Design, based on the process of how you produce your work.

"Around the same time I was reading a book called – *Orphism: The Evolution of Non-Figurative Painting in Paris, 1910 - 1914* by Paul Klee where I came across an interesting quote that seemed to fit my work at the moment, 'In the great pit of forms lie broken fragments to some of which we still cling. They provide abstraction with its material. A junkyard of unauthentic elements for the creation of impure crystals'."

Gareth said that some of the work he produced in that project, which was exhibited in Limerick, was the beginning of a new body of work.

"Basically that project gave me the freedom to open up my practice and consider different avenues for my work. When that exhibition finished in October – same time as my solo show was on at The Nag in the Cross Gallery, I applied to Éigse, using some of the work I produced for the show in Limerick. The funny thing was that work was experimental and I didn't see it as finished work. I saw the pieces

more as physical thoughts and concepts that could be used in later projects.

"I put them in Éigse and that I suppose is why I felt surprised that someone would be interested in the work. The images I submitted were objects, both paintings and sculpture which are not necessarily finished works but are physical thoughts, ideas that may or may not come to fruition in time, as it is the actual research or making part of the process that is more important to me than the finished piece."

He added that although it is an exhibition in one piece, it is made up of 18 small pieces that are themselves made with a variety of different materials.

THE MATERIALS

"Some are traditional painting, using a mixture of acrylic and gesso on MDF; other works, I used coloured cocktail sticks fixed together with PVA glue; some are found objects like the armrest of an office chair; and multi-coloured string; some are 3D objects- sculptural objects – using 2x2 wood, sanded down and painted with gesso and then put together with screws and wrapped in vinyl tape.

"There is one piece where I've sandwiched



At Home in the World

A Public Art Project
by Ceara Conway in Edenderry

BIG IMPACT:
Little Houses
Public Art Project
from Ceara Conway

“I found a great symbolism and correlation in the ideas of creating an environment for birds and that of creating a context for the residents of Killane Drive to meet.

“However sophisticated we become as human beings at the end of the day when we make a home it’s the same principle as nesting, and that takes time.

“What I learnt through the process and progress of the project was that to a degree, need creates community.

“The relationship developed further between myself, the residents and the children as the work commenced on the green and when an extra hand or extra wheel barrow was needed. The children became hugely involved on a physical level and also in their great curiosity and questioning about the work.

“The longer I was on site the more I saw that it was the process of the physical work that actually created interpersonal connections. **M**



Michael Harding

September saw the launch of three Public Art Projects associated with Housing Schemes in Westmeath - Kinnegad Story Project - Memories and Stories from Westmeath by Michael Harding; EveryoneE - a collaborative project between Art Group Exquisite CoLab and members of Mullingar Travelling Community and The Allotments Used to be Here - a photographic history of County Council Housing in Westmeath by Tim Durham.

All three projects will be launched in the Atrium, County Buildings,

Nothing Traditional about Music Initiative for Schools

by Neil Halligan

School-goers in county Longford, both primary and secondary, will get an up-close introduction to traditional Irish music through a novel initiative set up by the county’s Arts Office.

FUN TRAD is the name given to the music residency that will see local musicians travel to as many schools as possible in Longford, sharing their experience and craft.

“It’s an initiative to raise awareness in the schools among children in the county who listen to music of the fact that there are local musicians playing traditional music,” Fergus Kennedy, Longford County Arts Officer explained.

“Our objective would be to encourage a greater interest in Irish traditional music among the younger generation and hopefully encourage some people to maybe take up an instrument.

“We’ve put together a residency called Fun Trad; we hope to tour the primary and secondary schools in the county over the next few months on a pilot basis.”

The musicians involved are well known to lovers of trad music in the county. Pat Finnerty (pipes), Noel Sweeney

(flute) and Olive Kilbane (fiddle) will undertake the county-wide tour.

“We’ll start by playing some music for the children, explain our backgrounds and how we got involved in traditional music and talk about our instrument,” explained Pat.

“We’d hope to introduce children to a way of recognising different tunes and talk about reels, jigs and the like. There’ll also be an emphasis on getting the children who participate to come and join in with us at the end of an hour.”

As it’s a pilot scheme, the organisers will gauge what kind of a reception they get from the schools to see where it goes from here.

“If there are expressions of interest, we will then look at how we can best provide music education on a structured basis, given the resources available to us,” said Fergus.

Ultimately it’s hoped to tie in the residency with the county’s application for funding under Music Generation, a music network initiative funded by the rock band U2 and the Ireland Funds.

The Arts Officer said he hopes to develop more strands to the initial project and encompass other genres. “This (Fun Trad) is what is evolving as part of the Longford application to Music Generation for funding. It’s a rolling, funding scheme which means that we will be applying for funding continuously until we’re successful.

“The process of applying for funding has released an incredible amount of energy and interest in all forms of music in the county at all different levels.

“We’re putting together pilot projects of various types to assess the actual levels of interest with the ultimate aim of developing an audience for all kinds



of music - in this case traditional Irish music - and developing the skills of musicians in the county. They’re our two ultimate objectives of the larger project which is the Longford Music Education Partnership, which was set up as part of the Music Generation application.”

The long term goal would be to have permanent classes in musicianship, in various genres, and in various locations around the county. “To make music available to anybody that wants it,” as Pat explained. “One of my great beliefs is that there’s nobody who hasn’t got music; everybody has got music somewhere. If you’re only clicking your fingers, you’re playing music. I’d like to see as many kids participating as possible.”

The scheme will be rolled out in the coming weeks and schools across the county will be invited to take part on a first-come basis. **M**

GARDEN GALLERY CELEBRATES FIRST ANNIVERSARY

The Garden Gallery in Delvin has celebrated its first anniversary, after it was officially opened by Graham Knuttel in October 2010.

The past year has been a busy one for the gallery. In May it organised an exhibition by 18 local emerging artists at the Garradrimina book fair which attracted some 2,000 people and for many of the artists exhibiting, it was the first time they have ever displayed their work.

Hazel Revington-Cross was commissioned to paint a piece based on the theme of this year's book fair Gulliver's Travels and it was raffled on the day to help raise funds for Delvin's Sports and Leisure Centre.

Then, in August, Kilkenny-based Irish Artist, Paul Christopher Flynn exhibited his collection of New Works at the gallery. Paul's contemporary art work has been attracting critical notice from knowledgeable art buyers since he began showing on the railings of Dublin's St Stephen's Green in 2003.



EXHIBITIONISTS: Dave O'Shea, Paul Christopher Flynn, Mary McEvoy and Hazel Revington-Cross at Paul Christopher Flynn exhibition.

PIC: Larry Cooney, Westmeath Topic

Most recently the gallery was host to Delvin's contribution to Culture Night which was a hugely successful night kicking off with an astounding performance by Mary McEvoy of Jo Bangles written by Dave Lordon.



ACTING UP: Actress Mary McEvoy as Jo Bangles performed in the Gallery on Culture Night

Denise Scally, art teacher in Columba College in Killucan, demonstrated her skills at sculpture making, and people



POTTERY ART: Art teacher Denise Scally on Culture Night demonstrating pottery making were encouraged to get their hands dirty and try it for themselves. Denise is to fire the pieces and return them to the gallery where they can be collected

and taken home as a memento. Anyone interested in learning more about sculpture making will be pleased to know that Denise is currently holding evening classes in pottery making in Culumba College.

The Garden Gallery also introduced the work of Mullingar-based artist Kevin Meehan, on Culture Night – and while it was the first time his work was exhibited it attracted interest from several buyers.

Growing for 2012

The Garden Gallery is currently working on a project for 2012, to bring the gallery to Bloom, Ireland's largest horticultural show held in the Phoenix Park. The outdoor gallery has been designed by Dawn Aston, one of the gallery's visual artists, who also designs bespoke gardens. The project will involve six of the gallery's current exhibiting artists, Pauline Bewick, Graham Knuttel, Count Jonathan Von Bauman, Cormac O'Leary, Dawn Aston and Hazel Revington-Cross.

Open for Submissions

The Garden Gallery has also announced that it is now accepting applications for submissions of art work for 2012. Guidelines for submissions are on the gallery website

www.zhibit.org/thegardengallery. **M**

For further information:

The Garden Gallery is located at the Garden Centre in Crowdstown, Delvin.

Opening hours are Tuesday to Saturday 10am-6pm. Sunday & Bank Holiday Mondays 2-6pm. Closed on Monday.

It can be contacted at **044 9664723**.

To subscribe to the gallery's guest list email gardengallerycrowdstown@gmail.com or visit www.zhibit.org/thegardengallery.

TOY SOLDIERS COMES TO TULLAMORE

FilmOffaly 2011 Award Winner announced

Recently FilmOffaly at Offaly County Council in partnership with Filmbase set in motion its film award for the third year running and with two outstanding shorts already to its name – *Noreen* and *The End of the Reel*, a high standard has been set.

Coming through a rigorous short listing of 65 entries and an interview process, the emerging winner is Matthew Roche of Rhoda's Chaos Ltd for his script *Toy Soldiers*.

Toy Soldiers tells the story of an eternally bored teenager and the bane of his existence, his seven year old brother who he is forced to take care of. The short film, which will be shot in Tullamore over the winter, is a powerful coming of age drama that focuses on the polar relationship between two brothers while exploring such themes as family responsibility, teenage angst and rebellion.

Matthew Roche said: "Toy Soldiers draws a lot of inspiration from my formative years while growing up in Tipperary. It was a time when boundaries were tested and where bravado won out on a daily basis. I have always wanted to tell a coming-of-age drama full with teenage angst that deals with the pressures of growing up in Ireland

today. Along with Ciara and Mike, I am delighted that *Toy Soldiers* was selected out of what I'm sure was fierce competition. It is our aim to repay that decision in creating a memorable short film that will resonate with an audience both young and old."

Chairperson of FilmOffaly, Cllr Molly Buckley said: "We are delighted with the response and the outcome of the third year of the FilmOffaly award. We knew that we had to keep proactive about encouraging more production in Offaly and this project has certainly put us on the map. We look forward to working with the production team over the winter, to ensure that yet another production company has a good experience of working in Offaly."

The Production team is Matthew Roche (Writer), Ciara Gillan (Producer) and Mike Hayes (Director) and they are delighted to be the third project granted this award under the FilmOffaly scheme.

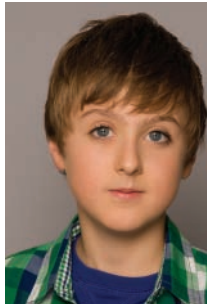
About receiving the award Matthew Roche said: "I am both humbled and grateful to be afforded the opportunity of creating an enthralling and powerful short film along with a talented team of young filmmakers.

"We are looking forward to working closely with FilmOffaly, the local

people and exploring all that Offaly has to offer as we aim to reach the high standards that our predecessors have set.

"The coming months will be an exciting time for us and we hope to share this experience with as many people as possible. We would like to thank everyone in advance for their time, help and patience as we go on this exciting journey together."

CAUGHT ON CAMERA: Actor Robert Donnelly will star as Charlie in *Toy Soldiers*. The young actor already has many credits to his name including a roles in *Pure Mule* and *The Tudors*; on stage he has acted in the Abbey in *Macbeth* and *The Gate* in *All my Sons*.



TAISPEÁNTAIS GEARRSCANNÁIN 2012

Beidh fáilte roimh gearrscannáin ó Co. Uíbh Fhailí, Co. Chill Dara agus Co. na Laoise le h-aghaidh clár.

TAISPEÁNTAIS GEARRSCANNÁIN 2012. Beidh na Taispeántais dátheangach ar siúil an tSamhraidh seo chugain.

Tá TAISPEÁNTAIS GEARRSCANNÁIN 2011 le fáil ar www.ionad.org (ag bun leathanach baile). Breis eolas ó tadhgoc@yahoo.ie Tadhg (Ó Cruadhlaioich)

LOCAL SHORTFILM SHOWCASE 2012

Bilingual short films are invited from filmmakers in Offaly, Kildare and Laois for THE LOCAL SHORTFILM SHOWCASE 2012.

The bilingual screenings take place next Summer.

THE LOCAL SHORTFILM SHOWCASE 2011 can be accessed at www.ionad.org (bottom right of homepage).

Further information available: tadhg@yahoo.ie

Tenth Book on Horizon for Daingean-based Author

By Fiona Robbins

It is the power of the writer to take a blank page fill it with words and cast a spell that holds the reader captive from the very first sentence. With an imagination as fertile as the rich, brown soil of her adopted home in Daingean, County Offaly, Scottish born author Geraldine O'Neill has been enchanting readers for almost a decade.



Geraldine O'Neill

The publication of her first novel, *Tara Flynn*, announced a contender to the Binchy crown and nine books later, Geraldine continues to claim the hearts of her eager readers who span the globe.

With a tenth anticipated book in the works, set for publication next year, readers are eagerly awaiting the next title from one of Ireland's favourite authors.

Geraldine is keen to share her craft and recently headed up an evening in Edenderry, entitled *A Litany of Literary Locals* for Culture Night, in which writers, poets and authors unveiled the force that lies behind the written word.

It was her move to Offaly that gave flight to the dream of becoming an author, she said. Here, Geraldine found a cultural scene that supported ambition and nurtured the creative impulse.

Along with fellow author, Malcolm Ross Macdonald, Geraldine established the

Offaly Writers' Group, a harbour for budding writers to plot their voyage into writing.

It has continued for almost two decades, going from strength to strength, like Geraldine's Book Circle, which fuels another of her passions, reading.

For as, any writer worth his or salt will tell you, to write well, you must read a lot. This may be a well worn scribe's adage but Geraldine makes it sound much more sumptuous, like appreciating the unfurling bouquet of fine wine or the luxuriant embrace of a warm fire on a cold day.

While many authors cite their reading list as knights in olden days may have wielded their maces, to club admiration from their audience, Geraldine speaks of reading with enjoyment. A book is not a token to put a gloss on an image, it has value.

Geraldine's own readers know this as her characters have gone onto their homes and comforted the reader on their hospital beds, they have consoled through bouts of depression and illness, they have been company and a voice from home across thousand of lonely miles, they have become friends to the reader, someone they are sad to part with as the story ends.

It is this empathy with the reader that is, of course, the hallmark of the successful writer. A connection is made between author and reader every time a book is opened. It is a source of surprise and

gratification to Geraldine to learn how strong that bond between she and her readers is.

A stream of email and letters have found their way from points around Ireland and around the world to Geraldine, sharing her readers' responses to her books.

Celebrating Offaly

However, as her plots vary, as new characters come along with every book, one thing remains the same – the leading role of county Offaly in each of Geraldine's books.

The books have brought Offaly into homes worldwide and sparked curiosity, affection, longing and memories amongst her readers.

While Ballygrace, the village that readers will know from her novels, does not exist the Offaly backdrop in Geraldine's books is authentic and achingly familiar to the home readership and expats alike.

To the uninitiated, the books have brought them to a destination they wish to visit in person one day, while still others have made the pilgrimage to retrace their favourite characters footsteps.

From putting Offaly on the literary map in a unique way, to celebrating the richness of the culture in the cradle of the midlands, Geraldine O'Neill is the last word! **M**

Geraldine's latest novel, *Summers End*, published by Poolbeg is on sale nationwide.

Briefs

LAOIS LEAVES LITERARY FESTIVAL 2011 LEAVES NO PAGE UNTURNED

THE LAOIS LEAVES LITERARY FESTIVAL 2011 – a wonderful mix of poetry, fiction, children's events, book launches, readings and music.

The official launch and the launch of the new Laois Leaves Anthology of Literature took place in November in Áras an Chontae.



John Banville



Dermot Healy



Ann Haverty

The Programme of events included:

A one-day intensive writing workshop with Pat Boran at the Arthouse, Stradbally.

A reading by best-selling novelist Monica McInerney at Portlaoise Library and a workshop with Anne Egan in Derrylamogue NS.

Literary evenings were hosted by Mary O'Donnell in Stradbally Hall with readings from John Banville, Jean O'Brien, Dermot Healy and Ann Haverty.



FULL OF AIR: *Poulnabrone Dolmen*, an inflatable public art project which took up temporary residence in Birr Castle and Clara Green during the 5th Annual Hullabaloo Festival. Hullabaloo took place in Birr and Clara at the start of November with another programme of quality, fun and accessible ways for young people to participate in the arts. Highlights of the festival included Jim Rick's *Poulnabrone Dolmen* and the *Moon Garden*, a moon-lit world of exotic and wonderful creatures by artist Tom Meskell and Monkeyshine Theatre Company's *Paper Princess*.



RATHENISKA LEAVES ITS MARK

Crop Marks – The Ratheniska Project – opened in The Drawing Room of the Dunamais Arts Centre Portlaoise, to a full house for Culture Night.

This exhibition by children, for children included a range of pieces created by the students and teachers of Ratheniska National School, assisted by Penhouse Design, their neighbouring graphic design company.

The original idea for this exhibition began earlier this year as Penhouse Design from Ratheniska in Laois celebrated its 15th year in the graphic design business.

To mark the occasion it wanted to promote creativity to a wider audience and so came up with a theme 'What does 15 mean to you?' and invited open submissions from clients, friends, fans and followers of the company to get creative and create a themed piece for an exhibition.



A huge variety of submissions from young and old, amateur and professional started arriving into the studio in various media, through their Penhouse Design Facebook page, by email and by post. The final collection of *Crop Marks* pieces were wire-hung on the walls of the grain store, transformed into a gallery for one night only on July 16, in the grounds of their design studio on a farm, with the expertise of sound and lighting engineer, Ronan Fingleton.

Following the success of that evening, Penhouse wanted to expand the idea

a little further and so Gillian Reidy, Director of Penhouse Design, approached Pauline Dunne, Ratheniska National School Principal, to see if they might collaborate on a similar project with the school children for Culture Night 2011 to represent their area.

The school jumped on board and so the plans began. When they returned to school this September, they were briefed with the project in hand and in just a few weeks they delivered amazing results. Each class, together with their teachers, took on the same theme 'What does 15 mean to you?' but interpreted it in their own way. The brilliant contributions by the Ratheniska National School children show a diverse and fun range of '15' themed pieces from every age group, making it a really enjoyable interactive exhibition for children and adults alike.



The pieces included a film (from junior infants and 6th class) which was shown on the big screen on Culture Night and is now on display on a TV in the gallery; books of future portraits from senior infants; a collection of favourite things from 1st class; 15 favourite movies from 2nd class; random 15 inspired creations from 3rd class; *Step Back in Time* history project from the 4th class children and

a group illustrated '15' poem from all in 5th class.

There is also a range of 3D pieces and a blackboard encouraging all visitors to contribute their answer to the same brief.

Further details and photos of the event can be found on the **Penhouse Design Facebook page** or their **Fresh Air blog**, at www.penhouse.ie



Pat Byrne Making Waves on Return Home

By Ann Egan

Pat went to Kildadooley National School and when only five or six years old won a little trophy in a Laois Art Competition and decided right then that art was to be his career and so went through school drawing and sketching.

His sketching continued at St Fergal's in Rathdowney – mostly cartoon characters and some still life work.

After secondary school he attended the Further Education Centre in Abbeyleix where he studied art for two years before heading to the Galway Mayo Institute of Technology.

"I went to college knowing I wanted to study paint, so paint and ceramics were the two that I chose. We had really good tutors from day one. In Second Year they were encouraging us to apply for exhibitions everywhere. They had us really well prepared for when we came out of college to be able to get packs together, to send off to the galleries. This meant that by the time we were finished, any of us that had taken their advice, we had relatively strong CV's coming out of college."

Pat who was the recent recipient of the Bursary of Laois County Council

Mountrath Studio, said: "I jumped at the chance to get back making work and it meant being closer to home as well. Since April I've been working away in the studio and I've been assisting in workshops with Vera McEvoy in Stradbally.

"The studio means a lot to me because it is just over twice the size of what we had in college; I can make larger scale work and larger bodies of work and it also has given me a great opportunity to pursue the career that I pretty much wanted since I was five years old."

Since Pat moved back home here he has been working with the four artists in the Arthouse, who collaborated together, to make a piece for the Electric Picnic. Using thousands of recycled bottles and hundreds of LED lights the group constructed a large honeycomb structure of some 187 honeycombs and demonstrates Pat's habit of exaggerating colour. (pictured on cover)

Pat also works part-time as an installation technician in The County Hall, installing exhibitions for artists.

But, his plans don't end here. "At the minute it's to apply for the Master in Fine Art. I want to apply to London and



Scotland. I don't think now that I was ready last year but in the studio here has helped me, really let me see that I would be able for it, and it is helping me to build a new body of work towards applying.

"As well as that then I've also been experimenting with video here in the studio. So I would also feel more confident about producing work in another medium as well.

"That's my plan for now. I'll see what way things are going, what opportunities are available and if something else was to arise, I would leave it off for another year, if I felt it was better for my work."

Pat is set to launch his first solo exhibition in the Library in Leixlip called *Shape* which consists of 12 paintings, made between Christmas 2010 and Christmas 2011.

Winning Design Revealed for Tullamore Community Arts Centre

Young Irish firm A2 Architects have been named as the winning designers for the new Tullamore Arts Centre

The Board of Tullamore Community Arts Centre accepted the recommendation of the Competition Jury for the winning design of the new Tullamore Community Arts Centre, bringing Tullamore one step closer to realising its long term ambition for an arts centre

The Competition Jury consisted of Pat Gallagher, County Manager; Sinead O'Reilly, Arts Officer; Cllr Molly Buckley (outgoing Cathaoirleach of Tullamore Town Council); Cllr Declan Harvey, Leas Cathaoirleach of Tullamore Town Council; Brian Gunning, Tullamore Musical Society and Architects Eddie Conroy, Bernadette Solon and Marguerite Murphy. The members of the jury anonymously shortlisted four entries out of an initial 119 who progressed to Stage 2; a number of weeks later they reached a unanimous decision on the winning entry by A2 Architects.

A2 Architects, are a young Irish firm, who already have a notable list of successful buildings and were nominated for the 2011 Irish Architectural Awards.

Peter Carroll of A2 architects said: "A2 are delighted to win the architectural competition for the design of the new Tullamore Community Arts Centre. We look forward to working with the Local Authority and all the interested parties in delivering this exciting project."

The winning design, website and fundraising draw was publically launched in July at



Tullamore Court Hotel, where a capacity crowd of more than 600 people listened intently to the architects' presentation on their design. The launch was punctuated by arts performances by musicians, singers, dancers from Tullamore to signify what this project is all about.

Fundraising Campaign Underway

A fundraising and awareness raising campaign is now underway, and artists are being invited to come up with fundraising ideas or artistic interventions which would raise the profile of the arts in Tullamore in the build up to the centre.

To date the Bridge Centre Shopping Mall has been played host a number of art projects and workshops on Saturdays, but more artists, musicians, writers and performers are needed to come forward to demonstrate the diversity and quality of arts practice in Offaly and in particular Tullamore.

For more information on the project see www.tullamorecommunityartscentre.ie and information on how to participate in the fundraising drive is also on the website.

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NEW ARDAGH HERITAGE AND CREATIVITY CENTRE

Located in the old schoolhouse building in the historic village of Ardagh, county Longford, the newly established Ardagh Heritage and Creativity Centre is a wonderful marriage of history and creativity.

Built in 1898, the centre houses an exhibition which outlines the history of Ardagh from the roots of the village in Irish mythology, to its development as an important early church site and its emergence as a model estate village.

But now, Annette Corkery and Ann Gerety Smyth aim to bring this history and heritage to life through a range of arts-based programmes for all ages.

Although only opened in recent months, the centre is already a creative hub combining arts education with cognitive, social and emotional growth of local children. There are also provisions at the centre for adults to explore their creative side.

Annette said: "The classes here provide those in attendance with an opportunity to express themselves through art, fabric and reading and the heritage centre here also provides us with an opportunity for art based programmes for schools. We are also hoping that we can get local artists on board as the centre expands."

The afternoon classes at the centre also provide children and teenagers with an opportunity to work with a diverse range of media from visual arts and crafts to photography, creative writing, drama and story telling.

The centre also boasts a coffee shop and wonderful heritage exhibition which is open to the public from Monday-Saturday, 10am to 5pm.

For further information call **086 3027602** or see www.creativeardagh.com

ENGAGE COMES BACK FOR 2012

Last year's ENGAGE with Architecture project in Offaly will be back in 2012, following another successful application by Offaly County Council to the Arts Council under the Engaging with Architecture Scheme 2011.

In 2011 the project focused on a temporary architecture centre in Tullamore but next year the plans are even bigger and better than before.

In March 2012 a month long programme of events will take place right across the county, from talks, exhibitions and tours.

The exhibitions will consist of the full submission for the architecture competition for the Tullamore Community Arts Centre and the winning entries for the Royal Institute of Architectural Awards 2011 but also watch out for a mobile pavilion en route across the county designed by Kenny Lyons & Associate architectural practice in Tullamore.

Crucially, much of the event in 2012 will also be online so watch out for school projects on the subject of a Space for Meeting and architecture that you can listen to.

Follow Engage with Architecture on Facebook or for more info contact engage@offalycoco.ie

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Laois Youth Theatre

Do you want to learn about theatre?

Do you want to play games?

Do you want to get creative?

Do you want to be in a show or run things back stage?

Or do you just want to have a good laugh and make new friends?

If so, then join one of our groups!



We meet for weekly workshops where we play games, learn new skills and work on pieces to show. This could be anything from devised work to scripted, movement, mime, text, improvisation, street theatre, film, radio, site specific pieces, music and song, rhythm and dance, topical dramas and comedic farces. There are so many opportunities for Youth Theatre members to avail of each year. Youth Theatre is a fun way to come out of your shell!

STRADBALLY

Ages 12 - 16
Saturday afternoons
Leader: Siobhain Coffey
Phone: 086 3300943

RATEDOWNYC

Ages 10 - 16
Saturday evenings
Leader: Aine Caulfield
Phone: 087 6321299

PORTLAOISE

Ages 12 - 18
Saturday mornings
Leader: Aine Caulfield
Phone: 087 6321299

PORTARLINGTON

Ages 8 - 12
Monday evenings
Leader: Julie Duane
Phone: 087 6185815





A Picture a thousand

Athlone Abbey Road Artists' Studios

A huge crowd turned out to see Athlone Mayor Alan Shaw's artistic talents as he dipped a brush into a pot of red paint and wrote Open on the canvas – his novel way of officially launching the new Abbey Road Artists' Studios.

The facility, established by Athlone Town Council, consists of four individual artists' studios along with a multi-purpose space which can be used for collaborative projects and exhibitions. Artists already in situ in the new units include Margo McNulty, Lesley Wingfield, Emer O'Connor and Catherine Rock. Westmeath County Manager Danny McLoughlin said at the official launch that the Council had spent €200,000 in order to establish the studios and thanked those who helped make the facility a reality, including former Town Clerk John Walsh, Director of Services Barry Kehoe and Town Engineer Alan Kelly.

Athlone Mayor Alan Shaw also thanked those involved and said he was delighted to launch a facility that would "help to

support, promote and develop the Arts" in Athlone.

Mayor Shaw asked that age old question of "what is art?" Giving his view on the matter the Mayor said: "An artist is someone who turns the ordinary into the extraordinary, who challenges and alters our perception of reality. This is a special talent and one that can make our lives infinitely rich.

"Art gives us a way to be creative and express ourselves. For some people, art is the entire reason they get out of bed in the morning. You could say art is something that makes us more thoughtful and well-rounded humans," he said.

The studios also incorporate a multi-purpose space which could be used for collaborative art projects and exhibitions. The studios also incorporate a large communal space upstairs suitable for group workshops which can be allocated on a daily basis.

For further information Westmeath Arts office details. **044 9332140**
www.westmeathcoco.ie/arts



says words...

Opens Doors



MEET THE ARTISTS:

MARGO McNULTY
 One of the artists who is renting a unit at the studios is Kiltoom's Margo McNulty. Originally from Achill Island, Margo lectures part-time in the Design Department at Athlone IT. Her art is mostly in the area of printmaking, and it deals with hidden history, memory and place, as well as aspects of everyday life and experience. Margo's work has been featured in exhibitions throughout Ireland, as well as in Poland, Paris and London. She felt that the new facility was a great addition to the town, and was something which had been needed for some time.

CATHERINE ROCK
 Athlone artist Catherine works mainly in the medium of oils. Following completion of two year course in Vocational Training Opportunity Scheme she went to Cluain Mhuire College of Art as a full time student and graduated in 2008 with a BA Art & Design. Catherine is an intuitive painter and her work is concerned with the human condition and at present, from the new studios in Athlone, Catherine is working on a new body of

work for her next exhibition. Her paintings are included in many private collections in Ireland and one acquired by Chartered Accountants, Ireland hangs in its HQ in Dublin.

EMER O'CONNOR
 Athlone's Emer O'Connor who studied English and Classical Civilisation at the National University of Ireland, Galway and Visual Arts Practice at the Institute of Art, Design and Technology in Dun Laoghaire, will also be working from the studios.

At the new studio Emer hopes to start exploring the genres of art documentary, sound art and the place of the archive in art and wishes to use the opportunity to engage with projects that relate to the locality during her time in the studio.

She recently staged an exhibition entitled the *Loveliest of the Law* examining the place of the garden in literature and specifically the works of Margaret Atwood, Elisabeth Bowen and Richard Hughes, at Athlone Library and Civic Buildings.

LESLEY WINGFIELD (Pictured Centre)
 Moate artist Lesley said she was looking forward to the new venture. "I think it's an amazing facility and it will nice to work here because it can get very isolated working in a studio space at home," she commented.

Lesley's art is mostly portraiture, and she hopes to use the Abbey Road studios "to be a bit more experimental and use different media."

She is one of four members of an art collective, Exquisite CoLab, which held an open studio project at the new facility from September 19 until Culture Night on September 23.

The open studio project gave the public a chance to call in to talk to the artists while they work on pieces for an exhibition entitled *The Case of the Exquisite Corpse*.

Paul Roy of Exquisite CoLab said the group really aimed to demystify art. "We've always taken the approach of bringing art to the public rather than being aloof about it."





**DUNAMAISE ARTS CENTRE
DANCE ARTIST IN
RESIDENCE:
CATHY COUGHLAN**

Dance Artist in Residence Cathy Coughlan is currently working with adults and older people from the Laois community and has an interest in the artistic outcomes which result from vocational and non-vocational practitioners in collaborative practice.

The residency will allow the artist to develop her practice around participatory modes of choreography through research and interaction with a wider community of dancers and musicians in Laois. The artist will work with targeted groups and individuals from a variety of ethnic backgrounds and will explore ideas around the sociological implications of large scale unemployment in rural communities. She is particularly interested in how a collective cultural identity can be established through the exploratory process of movement and making. This exploration follows on from her experience with Unlaois'd Youth Dance Company where the artist has identified unique movement, expression and collaborative processes as a direct result of cultural diversity within the group. The artist will use live performance alongside dance film/interactive installation to bring this work back into the community for a series of 'smaller viewings' with a view to a full-scale performance in the Dunamaise Arts Centre with attendance from the wider community.

"There is an expected aesthetic that comes with a professional dance performance. It is often refreshing, surprising and disarming to encounter community dance in a professional context. In fact these performances can resonate with audiences in a way that professional dance often fails to. What I'm interested in is the way in which an audience engages differently with work when the performers are 'real'. The movements translate in a very different way because they are often genuinely felt and experienced in that moment." **M**



One Giant Leap

Date: Saturday December 10 2011

Venue: The Dunamaise Arts Centre

Midlands Dance Symposium 2011

Over the past three years dance artists Cathy Coughlan and Michelle Cahill along with The Arts Council, The Dunamaise Arts Centre, Laois Arts Office, Laois Sports partnership, CoisCeim Broadreach and Laois Partnership have initiated a series of training programmes and collaborative projects that have led to a growing support and enthusiasm for community dance practice in Laois.

Each scheme has targeted a specific demographic such as school children (Erica Borges – Dance in Schools program), youth groups (CoisCeim Broadreach - Trick or street 2009) (Cathy Coughlan/Dunamaise – YES Scheme 2010), Adult groups (Michelle Cahill – Laban training 2010/ Dance Waves 2011), Inter-national groups (Cathy Coughlan/DAC – Dance Artist in residence 2011), parents and older people aged 50+ (Cathy Coughlan/DAC – Dance Artist in residence 2011).

However, up until now there has been no exchange between these groups and few professional opportunities for emerging dancers/dance artists to advance their practice beyond specific projects. This Symposium aims to;

- Connect communities by cultivating a network of dance artists/bodies working and funding work made in Laois and across the Midlands.
- Create opportunities for community practitioners and participants to engage and exchange with professional dance bodies.
- Build a cohesive programme of dance training and audience participation in Laois that is inclusive, sustainable and consistent.

The Symposium programme will be divided into three sections. The first section will consist of a series of performances (approximately eight groups) that highlight the ongoing developments in the Laois Dance

community. The second section will be given over to professional bodies who wish to make a presentation. (Provisionally Philippa Donnellan on *Developments in Community Practice*, Legitimate Bodies on *Professional dance in rural communities* and Anica Iou on *Dance and Education in the Midlands*). These presentations may be live/recorded performances, a lecture or both. The third section will consist of discussion and development meetings.

M



MAN-I-PULATE Open THE LAST TUESDAY CLUB

The inaugural meeting of THE LAST TUESDAY CLUB took place in Tullamore at the end of September. The club is an interaction of Offaly's artists, writers, musicians, performers and filmmakers and will meet (as the names suggests!) on the last Tuesday of every month, upstairs in Hugh Lynch's in Tullamore.

The first meeting was opened by a performance by MAN - I - PULATE. The group is Offaly based and comprises of four musicians – Joachim Hein, Conor Hein, Ann Magee and Dave Cashen, interpretative dancer Nick Bryson and visual artist Ronan Coughlan who has abandoned his usual practice and taken up a microphone to berate audience

members about their attitudes to the arts. Combining music, dance and the spoken word the performance is a frantic manifesto about what it means to be an artist from Offaly.

Coughlan provides the spoken word in a manner so intense that audiences either find it intrusive or ingenious.

The group had just returned from a week in the Dublin Fringe Festival which inspired the *Irish Times* to say that "Offaly is the last bastion of hope for the arts" but another critic to call Coughlan "a belligerent bxxxxxd".

Love it or hate it, MAN-I-PULATE is about how not to play it safe as an artist, how

to collaborate, push boundaries, challenge audiences and ultimately find a way to make work that is consequential and socially relevant.

All artists, writers, filmmakers, performers and musicians are welcome to come to any meeting. Each meeting will have a theme, but all ideas in relation to collaboration, pontification, celebration and more are all welcome.

For further information on THE LAST TUESDAY CLUB contact the Arts Office in Offaly County Council on **057 9357400** or join the group on Facebook. **M**





Honeycomb Project

Lights up Electric Picnic

The Arthouse Studios and Gallery, Stradbally, has been involving the community in many creative projects since its opening in May 2011. The resident artists have been searching and advocating vivid, new and wonderful ways to merge colour, life and art within the Stradbally community – and, perhaps, the Honeycomb Project is one of the most inventive of all!

The artists involved with the Honeycomb Project are Laura Byrne, Pat Byrne (Mountrath), Karen Hendy, Helena Malone, and Vera McEvoy. The community is an integral part of the project and the Honeycomb is a metaphor for a buzzing sense of people working together: collecting, cleaning, sorting, painting, testing and finally assembling the Honeycomb.

HONEYCOMB STRUCTURE

The Honeycomb is an 8ft hollow MDF cube which has 2,500 x 2 litre empty

plastic bottles protruding. Each bottle contains an individual coloured LED bulb and battery, forming a vibrant multicoloured octagonal pattern. This cube was assembled onsite around a Copper Birch tree in the Main Arena area of Stradbally Hall for Electric Picnic.

The 2,500 bottles form various coloured sections. Each octagonal shape requires 24 two litre bottles. This process is constructed by hand with the assistance of the local community, the Stradbally Youth Centre, Youth Theatre, and members of Cultúrbug and the Link Centre in Portlaoise. (Cultúrbug was established in March 2011 in collaboration with artist Vera McEvoy, the recipient of the Arthouse NCAD Graduate Award under the Percent for Art Scheme).

The bottles had been collected over a three month period, through donations

from Stradbally residents and from each of the artists' respective communities. AES Recycle Centre in Athy also generously donated bottles to the project. The artists called to AES on a weekly basis to sort through the 'plastic' collection area to retrieve the suitable bottles. These were then transported to the Arthouse where they were washed, dried and stored into colour coded areas, by the local volunteers, awaiting construction.

The artists and volunteers commenced the construction process on August 23. Some 20 local volunteers assisted the artists colour-coding, painting and final preparation work on the cube.

In the couple of days preceding Electric Picnic the LED's were connected to the batteries, dropped individually into the bottles and the caps replaced.

The life-force of the 10mm photodiode LEDs is 50,000 hours and each battery will last for 10,000 hours, ample for the duration of the assembly process and the event itself.

The finished work was a spectacular display of various colours that reflected and sparkled from the numerous shapes of the bottles.

Not surprisingly, the artwork attracted great attention during the Electric Picnic festival – some people used it as a landmark and a meeting point, most wanted to be photographed alongside it especially when it got dark, and many embraced as it was

VERA MCEVOY ARTIST STATEMENT

Vera McEvoy's work encourages an alternative reality by creating an awareness of the true scale in western developed society of the practice of consumption and of the reproductive value of products and materials.

Through a systematic process of intervention of discarded familiar objects, products and materials she creates work that examines polarities of scale both fragile and robust. Processes of deconstruction are an integral part of the work, which incorporates textile, paper, plastic and print.



said it had a wonderful romantic feel to it. There is even a rumour that a proposal took place on the south side of the Honeycomb around 10.30pm on Friday night September 2! We would love to hear more information on this. Do you know who the happy couple is?

INTERACTIVE ART

As with some art projects they can change and take on alternative meaning when positioned in an external public arena, especially one as lively and eclectic as Electric Picnic. The Honeycomb experienced some damage on the first night of the Festival.

The following morning something beautiful and wonderful happened as the artists commenced the repair work. Everyone, regardless of age wanted to help, it was interactive art at its very best.

People were really creative and explored many new designs and formats for the bottles and for the overall colour scheme. The engagement and dialogue between the artists and the various festival goers in relation to the process of making art was enlightening.

For further information contact Vera McEvoy at veramcevoy@gmail.com or see veramcevoy.blogspot.com



Mullingar Students Players



Midlands Youth Orchestra
Concert in Atrium County
Council Buildings



CULTURE VULTURES: Dermot McLaughlin pictured with Westmeath Arts Officer, Catherine Kelly, Laois Arts Officer Muireann Ni Chonaill and Offaly Arts Officer Sinead O'Reilly at the national launch of Culture Night at Dublin Castle.



RDS National Craft Competition Winners Exhibition in the Atrium County Council Buildings.



Alysha Brown, age 6 from Mullingar



Jenny Hynes and Valerie Beyer



Katie McClean, Tara Fitzgerald, Abigail Korzeniewski, Alexandra Tocher, Megan Lynch, Danny Adefulire

Midlands

A Hive of Culture on Culture Night 2011

By Brieghe Madden

The Midlands has been lauded by the man behind the Ireland-wide initiative as a shining example of what Culture Night is all about.

Culture Night is an initiative co-ordinated by Temple Bar Cultural Trust and supported by the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht in partnership with participating county councils. It is an all Ireland event and even sees cities participating outside the country.

This year Laois and Offaly joined Westmeath in celebrating Culture Night. Westmeath took part for the first time in 2010 and the neighbouring counties made sure to be part of the festivities in September 2011.

Dermot McLaughlin, Managing Director of Temple Bar Cultural Trust said the way the Midlands ran and promoted Culture Night was to be lauded and deserved special credit.

"We were delighted when Westmeath joined in Culture Night for the first time in 2010 and said that those organising and participating in it were a shining example to all due to the huge success of Culture Night 2010.

"And, we were thrilled that Westmeath took part again in 2011 and that it was joined by its neighbours in the Midlands – Laois and Offaly.

"Each and every year more and more counties are taking part in Culture Night and I want to thank the Arts Officers and all those who contributed so much in the Midlands to make Culture Night 2011 the biggest and best one yet!" **M**



Marie Therese Nally – harpist at the The Mark Makers exhibition.



Ethan Brown

WESTMEATH – the biggest Culture Night Event Outside Dublin

Yes again Westmeath came up trumps when it came to Culture Night with more than 80 events all around the county for all ages – the largest number of events outside the capital.

A special attraction at the launch of the Westmeath Culture Night Programme in August was the news that the RDS National Touring

Craft Exhibition would be on show in the Atrium of the County Council Buildings in the run up to Culture Night.

Councillor Mark Cooney, Cathaoirleach of Westmeath County Council, said of the one-day spectacular. "Every single event is free in efforts by the County Arts Office to showcase the county's talent and rich arts and culture heritage for the all."

Westmeath Culture Night 2011 built on the success of last year and boasted everything from drama, music – traditional and modern – performance art, exhibitions, street dancing, historic tours, face painting and much more. The

one-day and night of free events was designed to transform the county into a cultural hive of activity in the hope that everyone would open their eyes to what is on offer around them and offer people of all ages and persuasions the chance to experience culture in various forms including dancing, family fun, music, poetry, lectures, art, drama and sport to name only a few – and all for free.

Events started early in the morning and finished in the wee hours across the county including Mullingar, Kinnegad, Streete, Castlepollard, Milltown, Delvin, Ballinagargy, Moate and Athlone and included everything from storytelling for children to street performance and drama and even puppet-making and cookery classes!

Also, attractions such as Belvedere House, Dun Na Si Heritage Centre, Moate Museum, the Cathedral Museum Cathedral of Christ the King all threw open their doors and providing free tours. **M**

LAOIS CULTURE NIGHT 2011

Laois was a hive of activity for Culture Night 2011. Events in the Arthouse and Library in Stradbally included workshops led by Karen Hendy and Laura Byrne, and a jewellery design display by Helena Malone.

Young and old were entertained by Jeca Brazil who hosted a magical show. A performance by young members of the Ros Carrig traditional music group took place, this was followed by a classical guitar performance by Laois School of Music led by tutor Maurice Daly. The evening concluded with *Hidden Things* – a poetry and painting collaboration with Jean O'Brien, poet and Ray Murphy.

At the Dunamais Arts Centre the launch of an exhibition by Joe Hogan basket weaver took place. Also the Children's Gallery hosted an exhibition titled *Crop Marks* celebrating 15 years in business by Penhouse Design. A basket weaving demonstration by Martin Sinnott also took place.

In Helena Malone's work studio on James Fintan Lalor Avenue people

were invited to decorate the walls of the studio with their own favourite jewellery designs. The Parish Centre hosted a Céilí le Chéile Evening led by Maureen Culleton. In Portlaoise Library Jack Lynch provided an evening of storytelling. In Áras an Chontae, poet Arthur Broomfield Reading gave a workshop on how to unlock the meanings within poetry. Ann Egan hosted a creative writing workshop in Ballylinan Library.

Heritage trail walks were held in Portlaoise and in Abbeyleix and there was a free guided tour of Emo Court.

In Mountmellick the Mountmellick Museum extended its opening hours and provided free tours. In the Library Mountmellick artist Una McCormack painted live in the Art Gallery and Laois County Council Choir gave a concert. This was followed by a talk by best-selling author Monica McInerney.

The Arts Office who co-ordinated the day were delighted with the success and are already planning events for Culture Night 2012. **M**



Scenes from Laois Culture Night

Bogman Premières at Offaly Culture Night

Garret Daly from Daingean, county Offaly, recently premiered his new short film *Bogman* during the Culture Night celebrations in Tullamore on September 23.

Written and directed by Daly and starring Paul Keating, the film tells the story of the lonely existence of a man who finds something mysterious in a bog.

Shot entirely on location in Daingean the film sees local man Paul Keating making his screen debut. Keating was spotted locally by producer (and wife of Garret) Martina McGlynn and she convinced Garret to cast him in the role.

At the premier of the film Garret expressed his gratitude to the actor, who showed raw talent for the part, despite enduring long and cold wet

days out on the bog for much of the shoot.

Shot in RED, director of photography Kevin McGlynn, beautifully captures the big skies above the deep earth tones of the bog.

Bogman is very much a film of Offaly, the subject matter, the location, cast and crew; who better to make a film with such authenticity of place.

The film has been shown locally recently and next year is sure to be a feature on the film festival circuit nationally and internationally. **M**

Garret Daly and Martina McGlynn have a production company www.mixedbagmedia.com and further information about his project can be seen there.



Laois Artist, Gemma Guihan spends a month in

Florence

The summer of 2011 was one with a difference for artist Gemma Guihan when she was afforded the opportunity to travel to The Florence Academy of Art to study figurative sculpture. The Florence Academy of Art provides the highest level of instruction in classical methods of drawing, painting and sculpture for those that wish to pursue the realist tradition. Here Gemma recounts her time spent working in the city that is known as the home of sculpture.

“Residing on the Via de Servi, the Doumo was literally the first sight to greet me as I set out to walk to the studios each morning. Walking to and from the Academy provided me with the opportunity to explore many interesting little streets on route.

‘The studios opened from 8.30am until 10pm with instruction given in figurative sculpture each morning at 9am sharp through to 4pm with the option to continue working on our own in the evenings.

Tuition was given by four instructors – Sanne from Holland, Eran from Israel, Hywell from London and Rob the Director of the Sculpture Department. Each one is a professional sculptor with studios in Florence and England. Their passion for their subject was evident through the manner the coherent instruction was delivered to us throughout the course. Our group was made up of 14 participating artists from Ireland, England, Holland, Germany, France, Australia and the United States. This international mix provided me with many interesting exchanges of ideas and methods of work. It also offered me the opportunity to pitch my skills against theirs which I found to be very beneficial.

The first day was a very practical introduction to the tools that we would

require; we were brought to several interesting hardware stores that could provide these to us at a very modest cost. We were encouraged to make our own wooden modelling tools or to ‘customise’ purchased ones in order to have them meet our own personal requirements.

Week One

The first week commenced with a study of the skull in clay, and the afternoon session with a half life size study of the figure in contraposto pose (weight on one leg with the upper body compensating for the shift in weight e.g. Michelangelo’s statue of David). We were encouraged to

use two drawing implements throughout the process. One is clay for additive observations and the other is an incising tool used to draw internal information or to correct mistakes in overbuilding. The primary focus is to train the eye in order to compare the sculpture to the model. Proportions are developed and understood by recognising the large and small gestures of the model. As I had worked some years before with the sculptor Robin Buick ARHA for two years using callipers to measure the model, it was interesting to see that here the emphasis was on training the eye to compare the sculpture to the model, a method that I have always

personally preferred.

Week Two/Three

In week two the morning session progressed into a study of a life size portrait from a live model named Vladimir, from Montenegro, which was to be completed by the end of week three.

The contraposto pose was to be completed within the same time frame.

Week Four

Week four was spent making rubber moulds for both of these studies; these


would then be shipped back to Ireland for casting on my return home to Ireland.

The End

Throughout this time we were brought on weekend visits to the Museo del Bargello, Museo dell ‘Accademia, Museo degli Uffizi, and the Galleria Moderna, by a well informed art historian from the Academy.

These combined with the intense studio regime in very hot humid weather conditions (no air-conditioning allowed because of clay particles!) was both physically and mentally demanding but utterly stimulating and productive.

At the end of my sojourn in Florence I felt I had gained useful experience of the practical approaches to making sculpture but in the long term I know that the process of modelling that I have been taught at the Academy will have a beneficial impact on my work over the next year.

I can certainly see myself returning to the city of Florence to spend more time at the museums and of course to revisit some of those fascinating little hardware stores! 

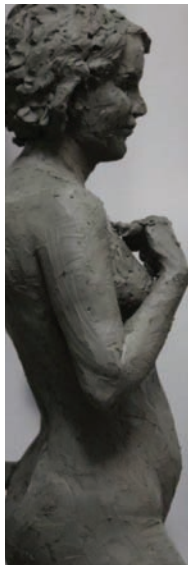
ABOUT THE ARTIST GEMMA GUIHAN

Gemma, a professional sculptor and painter initially worked from a studio at The Mill House, Killeigh County Offaly, where she exhibited regularly in The Royal Hibernian Academy Summer Exhibition and received their Artist of Promise Award in 1991 for her sculpture *The World Within I* Doubly prize, which explored the complex relationships of the Bronte sisters.

She moved her studio to The Gate Lodge, Ballyfin Estate in 1995, and in 1999 she had her first one woman exhibition at The Molesworth Gallery, Dublin.

Upon the sale of Ballyfin House by the Patrician Brothes in 2001, she moved her studio to The Malt House Stradbally, county Laois where she continued to have several one woman exhibitions at The Molesworth Gallery and The Dunamais Art Centre, Portlaoise.

In 2007 Gemma embarked on a series of commissions and participated in group shows in Cork, Wexford, Galway, Laois and Northern Ireland.



Gemma is now currently building a new studio at her home in Mountmellick county Laois. She is currently working on a series entitled *Sisters* that explores the intricacies of relationships begun in childhood. In conjunction with this she will begin work shortly on a series of portraits in clay that will serve as a sort of visual record of the people that are living and working in her environs at this time.

In September 2011, Gemma had the opportunity to revisit Ballyfin House, now an exclusive hotel, at the invitation of Jim Reynolds the Project Manager of the restoration committee. The occasion was to mark the presentation on loan to Ballyfin House of a life size bronze bust of Brother Maurice Murphy formerly of the Patrician College, Ballyfin sculpted by Gemma in 2001. The bust will now join the Ballyfin House Art Collection which consists of many fine examples of contemporary art as well as many family portraits and mementos which have returned to the house after an absence of 90 years.



The Story of the Ballymahon Writers’ Group By Neil Halligan

A notice placed in a Ballymahon shop window back in 1998 invited people along to the first ever meeting of the local writers’ group. The tag line invited ‘anyone who thought that they had a book in them to come along to a meeting’ in the Dean Egan Library.

An impressive total of 17 turned up for the first meeting, but by the next week it was just four. From the humble beginnings, the group has grown in strength and numbers, and have just released their first collection of work, entitled *Almost Lost*.

Former member Christina O’Connor initiated the group. “Christina was a writer and she wanted to write and she just didn’t have an outlet,” explained Valerie.

Meetings moved from the local library to a snug in the local pub and now take place in the newly refurbished library, where paintings of local literary greats Oliver Goldsmith and Leo Casey hang.

Group member Valerie Masters said the group meet every three weeks. “There’s no format. People will turn up with their work and we will either have a chat about general things or take turns reading out something, then analysing it. It’s very honest and can be sometimes painful.”

The members come from all types of backgrounds – teacher, psychiatric nurse, writer, solicitor and homemaker – but they all share a common love of writing, she explained.





Helium Children's Art

HELIUM, an arts and health company for children based in Keelstown, Mullingar aims to improve children's experience of healthcare systems through the development of innovative arts programmes and activities.



Helium works across the healthcare system offering a range of child centred projects led by professional artists. Projects range from once-off events to longer-term residencies. Professional development, mentorship and providing collaborative opportunities for artists are central to Helium's work. Helium is currently running a number of projects and professional events, including:

Scales & Tales at Cork University Hospital Scales & Tales, a six-month residency of music and storytelling, is currently taking place at Cork University Hospital, in partnership with Cork University Hospital Arts Committee and in collaboration with MusicAlive.

Once a month, musician Caoimhe Conlon and storyteller Fiona Dowling invite the children of the paediatric department together with parents, siblings and hospital staff to engage with musical instruments in making stories and characters come to life. The children can choose an instrument from the musical trolley and create their own sound effects: from bongos to bells, xylophones to maracas, and everything else in between, the children are given an artistic outlet in a relaxed and informal environment.

This project is kindly supported by the Cork Arts and Health Programme, the Irish Youth Foundation, The Arts Council and Cork University Hospital Arts Committee. Scales & Tales is Helium's second

residency in Cork University Hospital, following the Puppet Portal Project in 2010, and Helium is delighted to have the hospital's continuing support.

Infant Imaginings in Sligo and Leitrim Infant Imaginings, Helium's early years arts and health project, is taking place this year in collaboration with the HSE Early Intervention Teams in Sligo and Leitrim. Puppeteer Helene Hugel and musician Sean Callagy have been working once a month with the Early Intervention staff and onsite health practitioners in Sligo to complement their service provision. They will bring the project to the Parent and Toddler Group in Leitrim for four months running until the year end.

Infant Imaginings aims to promote relaxation, communication and learning between babies, toddlers and their parents through music, performance, puppetry and the visual arts. The emphasis in the current phase is on providing creative play experiences for toddlers with developmental delays or toddlers at risk of developmental delay and also on building on-going relationships between the artists, the families, and staff involved.

A key focus of Infant Imaginings is to develop arts experiences which parents can reproduce in the home environment and the artists leave behind a kit of props, puppets and Sean's acoustic CD of nursery rhymes for this purpose.

Inspired by the play sessions with the Parent and Toddler Group, Helene and Sean staged *The Rhyming Room* in The Model, Sligo, at the end of August, a work-in-progress interactive performance for children under three years and their parents.

Infant Imaginings is produced by Helium in partnership with the HSE Early Intervention Teams in Sligo and Leitrim and was made possible with help from the Arts Council, the Community Foundation for Ireland, the National Lottery through the HSE and Social Entrepreneurs Ireland.

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

A symposium examining arts for children in hospital within the context of the

Puppet Portal Project

Helium, in collaboration with Kids' Own Publishing Partnership, hosted this symposium as part of the 2011 International Puppet Festival Ireland in The Ark, A Cultural Centre for Children in Dublin. The symposium was for artists and healthcare professionals interested in participatory arts with children in hospital.

The day included presentations from artists and healthcare workers who participated in the Puppet Portal Project, hands-on workshops, and plenary discussion on the future of participatory arts with children in hospital with contributions from a panel of healthcare professionals and arts professionals.

The Puppet Portal Project was a national arts and technology programme with children in hospital which was produced by Helium in partnership with The Centre for Health Informatics, Trinity College, Dublin, and in collaboration with Kids' Own Publishing Partnership. Over 2009 and 2010, the artist-in-residency project saw seven artists working collaboratively with approximately 800 children for 30 weeks across seven hospitals using Ait Eile, the hospital webportal, to share their puppet making, stories, and films.

The Puppet Portal Symposium was kindly supported by the Arts Council. Helium would like to gratefully acknowledge the in-kind support of The Ark, A Cultural Centre for Children, for providing the venue for this event. M



Still Reading After All These Years

by Cathy Fennelly – Cathy is currently Secretary of the Portlaoise Literature Studies Group and has been a member for the last nine years.



The Portlaoise Literature Studies Group was founded over 20 years ago, with a gathering of interested readers into a discussion group and is still serving its purposes today – encouraging people to read good literature, to study the context and era of a work and listen to other's opinions on it. By meeting weekly, members keep up a good reading pace and the book is fresh in the mind for discussion.

A few of the founding members still participate and new members join each year, keeping the mix dynamic. There are several nationalities represented, so viewpoints are varied and interesting.

The group has always been tutor-led. Current tutor Gesa Cosby from Stradbally researches the author and topic of a book and guides the discussions.

The Literature Studies Group has a long association with the VEC and has been supported by grants from the VEC and Laois County Council Arts Office helping to offset the cost. It is a non-profit group, with officer duties volunteered for on a two-year basis.

A book title is chosen and studied for several weeks, interspersed with short stories, some drama and poetry. During the last year, we began our reading in the refined drawing rooms of Bath, with *Emma*, by Jane Austen.

A drastic shift in setting and action happened when we rode down the Mississippi river with Huckleberry Finn and Jim, the freed slave. The vernacular dialect by Mark Twain and various eccentric characters were very enjoyable. Another novel set in the American Deep South, *The Help* by Katherine Stockett, was our next choice. Set in the 1960's, it exposed the relationships and treatment of the black hired help by the white well-to-do families they worked for. It

exposed some awful human traits of selfishness and cruelty.

Italian Shoes took us to another climate and place, since it was set in Northern Sweden. The isolation of the main character was both physical and mental. As the story unfolds, he comes back in contact with an early lover, his daughter whom he didn't know existed and other people he must interact with. Many in the group enjoyed his journey of emotion and maturity.

Barbara Kingsolver's *The Lacuna* was a daunting book, a long read peppered with strong roles, including the real life artists Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera and their refugee guest, Leon Trotsky. The lacuna the boy goes through encompasses passages of time, culture and relationships. The book introduced topics such as McCarthyism, Russian Revolution, art and the Kahlo/Rivera personas. The vibrancy of Mexico and the artists' world was brought to life for us with the movie *Frida*. Further cultural enlightenment came with our outing

to the IMMA for the timely Kahlo/Rivera exhibit. The guided tour was much appreciated.

The Hare with Amber Eyes by Edmund de Waal was a superb read. The story travelled with the netsuke through generations of a wealthy Jewish clan, through their business and social successes through the terrible persecution of Jews in WWII.

Our last novel was the beautifully and subtly written *Love and Summer* by William Trevor. The 1950's Ireland small town was accurately portrayed, with the poisoned relationships of families, grief and lost love very poignant.

The new term has started and runs on Wednesdays from 10.45am until 12:45pm in the Portlaoise Parish Centre. The fee per 10-week term is €60, to cover costs of the tutor and facilities. M

For further information contact Hilary on 087 635 6715 or Cathy on 057 866 1798.

Following the hugely successful first year of the Longford Photography Schools' Programme, which involved Cnoc Mhuire, Granard; Mercy, Ballymahon; St Mel's College, Templemichael College and Moyné Community School, a book is now on the horizon.

Photographer Shelley Corcoran, who facilitated the schools' programme, and County Longford Arts Officer Fergus Kennedy are joining forces to produce a book which will be an art educational tool for those interested in exploring photography as an art.



SnapHappy

"The aim of the book is to encourage the students to increase their visual awareness and creativity through photography," Shelley explained.

"It will be there to give them guidelines and exercises they can try which ultimately involves them having to bring their creative selves to each photograph that they execute."

The book is aimed at secondary school level and its purpose is to demystify the technical side of photography and show students how to use photography to express themselves artistically, like any other art medium – paint, clay, sculpture.

"After all, paint is just paint, it is what the artist does with it that makes it a work of art," Shelley noted. "The book

will focus on photography as an art form but also explains the technical side to photography so that the students are comfortable in the knowledge that they can create an art photograph because they understand camera functions, settings and operations.

"The book is there to encourage creative ideas in the students with outlines of situations that they can try for themselves and to encourage them to express themselves and their ideas creatively."

The book will be illustrated by photographs taken in the first year of the Schools' Programme by the students from the Longford schools that took part in the programme to date – all of whom have put their creative stamp on what they were thought throughout the year. **M**

Now You're Talking to Patrick Carton

The Border

By Patrick Carton

*The fence is dense, the wall is tall
but the border is not there at all
it wanders in a lonely line through
rows and rows of pensive pines
a little line marked on a map
but when you go there to mind the gap
there isn't any gap to mind
just the wind that whistles
through the pines
and the lads from the legion
of the lost
who man that lonely frontier post
they've been yearning there
for manys the year
to face a fundamental fear
though standing still they fight a war
between what seems to be
and what isn't there*

Patrick Carton is a poet from Horseleap on the Westmeath-Offaly border.

"I live in a liminal land," he said, "the place where poetry comes from is on the border – the border between sleep and wakefulness, where the darkness of the night meets the brightness of the day, where the land meets the sea. There are little birds that fly along the shoreline and little fish that swim in the sea near the shore and I go out with a net and try to catch them." After being schooled in Horseleap and Moate, followed by a couple of years working in Athlone Public Library, Patrick wandered out into the world but wherever he went he brought along his notebook and pens.

He eventually fetched up in Galway, the city of the tribes as a mature student in the university where he studied for an Arts Degree. Patrick also has a Masters in Philosophy and a thesis entitled *Ego-Consciousness in Descartes' Meditations* no less.

He first cut his teeth as a performance poet in Galway reciting "blasts of bardic brilliance" across crowded public houses at Irish traditional music sessions before going on to devise a one man show. This is a constantly evolving entity, featuring an eclectic mix of old and new, poetry and song, original material and odd bits he picked up here and there.

At this stage Patrick has appeared at several venues at home and abroad and a number of years ago also recorded a CD *Now You're Talking*. He recited material from this CD on *The View* with John Kelly



on RTE1 television to enormously positive reaction.

He also featured on an hour-length documentary on Midlands 103 local radio in the *Living Voices* programme with Maurice O'Keefe talking about such topics as the time when every field had a name and vernacular architecture and the power of poetry to lift us out of the ordinary.

He recently appeared in *The Parish*, also on Midlands 103 with Kieran Feeney with a number of other local Horseleap characters. Patrick entertained all with a rendition of *Second Hand Horse*, his song about the equestrian statue which now graces the village green there.

Patrick feels it is a calling to entertain the public and so when he recites it is an exhilarating theatrical performance rather than a staid old poetry reading. "This is the authentic voice of the Irish heartland – witty, pithy, acerbic – frequently hilarious," according to Kilian Kennedy.

But his poetry recitals have brought him more than fame and popularity as on October 1, 2009 when Patrick was reciting poetry in the Arts Centre in Mullingar one impressed audience member Anne Willis just had to say hello. The meeting was, as they say, poetry in motion and Patrick and Anne are now the proud parents of 11 month old baby Charlotte Jane.

PATRICK HAS APPEARED AT:

- The Electric Picnic
- Cuirt Festival of Literature, Galway
- Festival of the Fires, Uisneach
- Galway Arts Festival
- Muscailt Festival, NUI Galway
- Irish/American Arts Festival, Washington DC
- All-Ireland Amateur Drama Festival, Athlone
- Patrick Kavanagh Raglan Road Festival Inniskeen Festival, Monaghan – and many others.

With a repertoire suitable for both children and young adults Patrick is a frequent visitor to Horseleap National School and has also worked with Transition Year Students in Moate Community College and told stories in Athlone and Mullingar libraries.

If you are interested in organising a poetry performance or storytelling session contact Patrick at patrickcarton@eircom.net **M**

Festive Entertainment with Amahl and the Night Visitors

Herbert Lodge Arts Centre with the Herbert Lodge Ensemble present *Amahl and the Night Visitors*, by Gian Carlo Menotti, on Saturday, December 3 in Stradbally Hall, county Laois and on Sunday, December 4 in the Convent Chapel Arts Centre, Nas na Riogh Housing, Naas, Co Kildare.

This short opera focuses on Amahl and his widowed mother who live in a little hut perched precariously among the hills, on the route of the Magi to Bethlehem.

The Three Kings break their journey at the hut of this impoverished family where Christmas comes early to change their lives forever.

This opera is followed by a performance of the Bach A Minor Violin Concerto performed by Samuel Allen, an exceptionally talented 11 year old who studies violin in Moscow. Samuel who has attended the Herbert Lodge Summer Music School plans to continue his studies at the Moscow Conservatoire.

The evening will conclude with Christmas carols.

Tickets are €15 and available from the Dunamaisé Arts Centre Box Office, Portlaoise, Co Laois on 057-8663355 or at www.dunamaisé.ie. For further information contact Berna Hayden, on 085 1612474.

Characters

Amahl:David O Carroll
Mother:Eimear McCarthy & Sophie O Carroll
King Kasper:John Duffy *Tenor*
King Melchior:Philip Scott *Baritone*
King Balthazar:Dave Murphy *Bass*
Page:Con Mc McNamara *Bass*
Shepherdesses:Annie Mae de Clare
.....Roisin King
.....Helena O'Brien
.....Emer O'Connor
.....Aimee McGrath
.....Toya Retigan
.....Rebecca Troy
.....Anna Barry
Dancers:The Leinster School of Dancing, Newbridge
Director:Berna Hayden
Producer:Colonel Co McNamara **M**

Artists Nicola Lane and Karl Somers last year took over the running of a teashop in the courtyard of Tullynally Castle in Caslepollard with a view to eventually expanding into the disused stables adjacent to it and opening their own gallery space, from where they hoped to foster and champion the visual arts.

And, so, last spring they opened *The Platform Gallery*. This space has been created with dual objectives, the first of which being to provide a foothold for Contemporary Art in the locale, giving visibility to professional visual artists at various stages in their careers and working in a wide range of media.

The two intend to give preference to work which challenges the traditional and conservative preconceptions on what constitutes valid art both by way of medium and content.

Their second aim is to facilitate the discourse on Contemporary Art and to provide a base for the production of a range of cultural activities – such as artists' talks, screenings, workshops, performance pieces and other events.

Artists, both local and international will be given the chance to work in a space which lends itself both as a neutral backdrop for existing work and as a space for more responsive, site specific work.



Toffee Noses by Nicola Lane

Artist-run Gallery in Castlepollard



Anne Egan opens Ursula Meehan's Show

The remit of *The Platform* is to be an artist friendly space, run by artists for artists. The space itself is in a converted Georgian stable block, and occupies what was originally three loose stalls. The floor is the original brick, complete with drainage gullies, and the wooden stall dividers still bear the gnaw marks of its earlier equine inhabitants. The stalls are steeped in atmosphere and history, but are open to use as a blank stage for the exhibiting of existing works as well as works which seek to draw on and respond to the space itself, and to the setting, the historic Tullynally Castle and Gardens, dating back to the eighteenth century. So far, this year, there have been four exhibitions in the Platform, starting with Ursula Meehan's *Retrospective*, followed by Marta Szczudlo's *Faith, There Are Also Circles*: a group show by Nicola Lane, Nina Tanis and Mai Ryan, and Goosle Earth, *Coming Home* by Eloise O'Hare. The work has ranged from abstract painting (in the case of Meehan), to Cubist Expressionism in the work of Szczudlo, to abstract, figurative and illustrative drawing in the cases of Lane, Tanis, Ryan and O'Hare's work respectively.

In their capacity as curators and as artists, Lane and Somers plan to introduce this sleepy rural idyll to installation works,

sound works and street art in the forthcoming future, as well as hoping to cultivate interdisciplinary fusion between the visual arts and other art forms.

This approach of bringing together disciplines evidenced itself during the very first opening at *The Platform*, when poet and writer Anne Egan gave an introductory talk on the works of artist Ursula Meehan, in which she explored the work verbally, riffing on the themes prevalent within it. This had the effect of giving a foothold to the audience, some of whom might not have had either exposure to, or tolerance of abstract art works. Egan's poetic approach to Meehan's work provided a bridge between the work and the audience, which made it accessible to some, and deepened the experience for others. Finding this to be a worthwhile formula, *Platform* repeated this method and there will be further developments of this kind down the line.

In terms of their own work as artists, Lane and Somers both graduated from NCAD in 2003 and 2004 with a Degree and Masters (respectively) in Fine Art, choose to work in what ever medium the work dictates. **M**

Gallery hours are
1–6pm, Thursday–Sunday, all year round.
Also see tullynally castle tearooms at www.tullynallycastle.com.

ABOUT: LANE

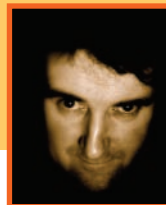
Lane works in a diverse range of materials, tending to make ephemeral pieces which combine traditional sculptural techniques with less traditional, experimental materials such as toffee, paper and soap.

These 'Time based' works tend to disappear over time leaving behind only whatever record the artist has made of the 'action'. She also works in Sound and in Video Installation.



ABOUT: SOMERS

Somers, whilst being equally at home painting, film-making or working in sculpture, is also very interested in the written word, and is currently working on a volume of poems. Both in visual and written media, Somers is exercised by the idea of the city merging with the countryside, one overlaying the other in a sort of tidal pulse. Both artists feel the city to be a prevalent force within their work. This can manifest as a sense of loss at the city's distance, and at the same time, it can create an impetus – as if by being separated from the city creates an urge to re-create it in some form.



CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

The Platform Gallery is now open for submissions and will be putting out a call to artists via the usual channels very soon. For inquiries please contact Nicola Lane 086 8647451 or email nicolapeola@gmail.com.



Lost in Traffic by Karl Somers

FROM THE CENTRE OUT BY KARL SOMERS

From the small street the light creeps slowly along the wall. Up to the window above and through the crack in the curtains. It plays on the ceiling and as the cars drive by, reflections like doodles draw the mornings first thoughts. Car horns and buses and quick feet passing by. Down the road where the children play, the gold light takes their place. The shades walk in the morning like footsteps on the path. The silent light falls and lands on the moss in the corner of the dark street.

Out on the country roads the rain falls again. Quiet rain, it fills the eyes with tears. People cry in the rain and most can't be seen in it's mask. Seagulls weep in the skies above, out along the Booterstown wall. By the waves where the corn crakes don't live, men collect lug worms. Their in the distance and reflections in the grey are small. Green trains full of wavers crosses this watery place and buckets with castle memories fill the boys thoughts. Ice creams and green balloons and hula hoops hanging outside the seaside shops. "Can I have a 99 daddy?" the boy asks.

On Henry street the shutters are coming down on the evenings eyes and the shops will soon sleep again, tucked up in receipts and thoughts of dreaming shop makers. The light nearly cries now coming to the end of a swollen day. The artists make their way to Howth to watch the sun go down and fall asleep by the tune. Coffee houses still open and artist eyes watching the last light falling on faces across the room. The street man from Templeogue, head down and watched feet, walks slowly along the edge of the broken town. He follows the last light and he's wondering into the last blankets of night. Those bricked up eyes have seen a lot and the walls will fall again and leave the ground covered in dust and the man will walk free. The evening falls into the night like a drunkard in the alley. It trips and crawls and swells it's eyes and shouts at the sky "WHY?". Across town dinners are cooked and bedsit diners sit by the glow of the tubular light. Projection on the back screen and projection on the autumn leaves gold. Caged in thought and falling down walls the sitters cry in their uncomfortable ways. Let the city cry for us, let it crawl through the night for us and let it feed its cats in the tunnels beneath the streets where the people don't know.

Out by Ringsend the boats smile their lights and slink through the watery road. The captain whistles tunes and drinks from the sight of the moon. The men call at the night doors and captains eyes weep at the wanting companionships drifting the bay. The strings of happy lights and thought of darker days. The mullet who rolls, shallow in the deep water, watches the ships eyes for years, she feels the soul and tenders the night, the broken hearts sink in the sands. Along those walls lovers that once called now throw there dreams into the darkness and scream at the fish of the town. The taxis don't stop for the cross roads and walkers foot step home on the cracked pavements. Pathways in the dream state, hollowed out by the night.



Big Turnout for Belinda McKeon's Book Launch

A capacity crowd filled the Backstage Theatre for the recent launch of the debut novel *So/as*, by the latest writer to emerge from Longford, Belinda McKeon.

The night was an enjoyable combination of classical music provided by the Windsong Classical Harp Ensemble from Lanesborough, an in-depth interview by award winning poet and dramatist Noel Monahan from Granard and a reading by the author. The night's proceedings were smoothly orchestrated by Adrian Duncan a musicologist from Ballymahon.

There was a tremendous atmosphere of affection and pride for the author on the night, due in no small part, to the huge numbers of past teachers, old school friends and extended family members who were present on the night.

The novel was particularly well received as it was by a local writer but also because it was based, partly, in rural Longford and the majority of the cast of characters were also Longford people.

It is felt that the success of this novel and its close association with county Longford will provide invaluable encouragement to the myriad of aspiring writers in Longford and Belinda has now added her name to the many writes who have emerged from county Longford in modern times, writers such as; Noel Monahan, Vona Groarke, Breda Sullivan, Anne Skelly, Margaret Nohilly and Mary Melvin Geoghegan.

M



Wise Beyond her Years

Angela Madden heads to Leitrim to catch author **Belinda McKeon** at her in-laws' between book launches of her acclaimed *Solace* on her whirlwind trip back home from the Big Apple.

Chatting, curled in an armchair in her in-laws warming home in Leitrim, mug of coffee in hand, Belinda McKeon appears to hold a maturity and understanding far beyond her 32 years. In fact looking at her she has a somewhat ephemeral and child-like appearance making her seem even younger than she really is.

She also excludes an air of calm and quiet practicality associated with a long life rather than one that is near its start – and yet it is years since she started her craft, almost a quarter of a century ago!

“I started writing very young but I think a lot of people do but not a lot of people become writers because they don't carry it through. I loved writing stories; it was always part of my education, story writing both in Irish and English.”

“...you just have to sit down and start writing and the words will come”

However, she highlights that a teacher, Eamon Brennan was a huge influence in her early education and her story telling – then and now.

She recalls how, even back then in fourth class, her mentor advised her that life as a writer might not pay the bills and planted the idea of journalism as an ideal one to write to pay the bills sitting alongside her desire to develop as an author. “I wanted to be a journalist from I was very young. The teacher said it was a way to make a living writing.” Today Belinda still works as an arts writer for the *Irish Times*. But, Belinda says she writes exactly the same now as she did when she was eight and says simply “you just have to sit down and start writing and the words will come”.

This matter of fact approach seems to work for the mild manner Belinda

as the critics have been raving about her debut novel *Solace*.

“Accomplished... Thoughtful and intelligent... A work steeped in verisimilitude, whose integrity is palpable and its concerns clear-cut,” said the *Times Literary Supplement* with the *Irish Independent* commenting: “The juxtaposition of urban and rural Ireland is very effective... A compelling story of how the adult family unit renegotiates itself. There is no denying McKeon's talent.” *The Guardian, Economist, The Times, The Sunday Times, Sunday Business Post, Sunday Herald* and the *Belfast Telegraph* are among a raft of titles publishing reviews praising *Solace*.

However, it seems that, despite the full marks from the critics, her teacher was indeed wise and Belinda herself admits that the price put on art in general, in the vast majority of cases, would not afford a living. So, she has a varied career encompassing many aspects of the arts from working as a journalist, teaching and representing Culture Ireland in the US.

In the last position Belinda plays a crucial role in the promotion of Irish writers and arts in the US and helped arrange for some 100 writers to appear in 25 states last year – an impressive feat in itself and even more so when you consider that the likes of Seamus Heaney have taken part. Part of Belinda's role is to identify venues where artists can be showcased and then work with the venues to make the event happen.

It is perhaps not that surprising that a key aspect of Belinda's career is harnessing Irish talent and giving it voice. After all she said: “It is so important to offer the opportunity to meet with other writers or artists and give the opportunity to people interested to fully develop themselves.”

Belinda also strikes you as a person who holds a practical outlook on life and as a young person living in the US, away from home, I ask her about emigration and the Irish diaspora – two sides of the one coin and good or bad depending on one's view or experience of emigration.

“The Irish always had a big reach, even way, way back. By and large Australia and America exist as they

do today because of the Irish.” But, she points out that no-one likes to be forced to leave their home and their roots. “We will not really see the impact for another 10 to 15 years; they have only just left.”

She herself admits that, at the present time, coming home is simply not an option for herself and her husband and so Brooklyn has become their modern-day home – at least for now.

Belinda's roots lie in Cloonany, a small townland close to Stonepark where she attended National School before heading to Scoil Mhuire, Convent of Mercy in Longford. She shares the fact that sometimes the educational system can be too heavily focused on the regurgitation of facts and figures and can be

“It is just normal to them. It is different with members of your own family; first and foremost they are just your family.”

quite limiting for a teenager.

She has two sisters Rebecca, 29 and Alice who is 20 and a brother Michael, 28 who, she admits, are underwhelmed by her success and acclaim as an author despite the many recent newspaper, radio and TV interviews following the critical applause of *Solace*. “It is just normal to them. It is different with members of your own family; first and foremost they are just your family.”

Her more star struck fans will be pleased to hear that she has already inked her quill for her next book which she hopes to reveal in 2012. The talented writer who is not limited to one medium, and is an award-winning playwright, is also working on a play commissioned from the Abbey Theatre.

And, so, Belinda is showing all the signs that *Solace* is only the beginning of a prolific writing career with offerings eagerly anticipated and well received from ‘those in the know’ and the public alike. And, who knows, maybe one of these days her art will pay the bills. **M**



Excerpt from Solace

Mark Casey has left home, the rural Irish community where his family has farmed the same land for generations. He is a doctoral student in Dublin, a vibrant, contemporary city full of possibility. But to his father, Tom, who needs help baling the hay and ploughing the fields, Mark's pursuit isn't work at all, and they are set on a collision course, while Mark's mother negotiates a fragile peace.

To escape the seemingly endless struggle of completing his thesis, Mark finds himself whiling away his time with pubs and parties. His is a life without focus or responsibility, until he meets Joanne Lynch, a trainee solicitor whom he finds irresistible – and who he later discovers happens to be the daughter of a man who once spectacularly wronged Mark's father, and whose betrayal Tom has remembered every single day for twenty years.

Joanne too has escaped the life circumscribed by her overbearing father, and she is torn between the opportunities to succeed in this new wealthy Dublin and the moral dilemmas it presents. But for a brief time Mark and Joanne are able to share the chaos and rapture of a love affair, an emotional calm, until the lightning strike of tragedy changes everything.

M





EDDIE O'NEILL

Drum Circle Facilitator

in conversation with writer, **Ann Egan**

Q: Eddie, will you tell me a little about yourself?

A: I'm from Saggart, county Dublin. I've lived in Naas, Newbridge and now I am in Rathdowney. Laois which is great for my work. I am right in the middle, I can travel.

Q: You are deeply inspired by your music. Can you talk about your journey with music to where you are today?

A: I've been playing drums since I was round 12 years of age. I was taught by a gentleman called John Wadham, a famous jazz drummer around Dublin but I'm largely self-taught as well. Like any kid, I started playing with my brothers and we even had a little band. We used to play a lot of support – the little band before the showband.

Q: What was the name of your band and where did you play?

A: We were called, The Red Hands because of the name O'Neill. There were four of us and we played in a lot of the ballrooms – The National Ballroom, Parnell Square, The Olympic off Camden St and TV Club, Harcourt St.

Q: What bands did you support and what was the experience like as a musician?

A: The Miami Showband, The Royal Showband, The Indians and many more. It was a wonderful experience and was a great way of learning. I used to watch the drummers playing with the bands. I'd be behind them on the stage. I'd watch every move they'd make. It was a great experience because when you're a young guy like that, getting to watch the musicians up close was a great learning curve. From that I moved on to play with some of the bands professionally. In the mid seventies, I became professional myself.

Q: What bands did you play with?

A: I worked with Joe Cuddy for many years. There was a great cabaret circle ... the Joe Cuddy Backing Band, Aengus McNally was on guitar. We toured the UK and all over Ireland, north and south. After Joe, I moved and played with Geraldine Brannigan's Backing Band and through Geraldine I did quite a bit of work with Phil Coulter and did a TV

show with him. I went to the Lebanon twice with Geraldine's band to perform for the United Nation's Troops. That was a marvellous experience. It really opened my eyes to a lot of things – not so much musically – as it was the first time in my life I had ever been that far away. I remember driving through Beirut and the whole place bombed out of it. We used to go from one camp to another to play for different countries, their battalions. I remember there were the Fiji, the French, the Norwegians and we had an entourage when we were moving from camp to camp, of body guards because there used to be lots of rebel groups and they had roadblocks. They'd stop us, come over to our tour bus, they'd check us out – passports, everything. It was scary. They were rebels not officials. We survived.

Q: What did your music mean to the troops?

A: It was a great morale booster for the troops but, I think for the Irish soldiers what was really good for them was meeting people from home. They used to talk to us a lot. The soldiers really appreciated and enjoyed Geraldine and her band and because there was such danger involved, they were very grateful.

Q: Where did music take you after this, Eddie?

A: I actually had my own band again with my brother. We started a rockband called, *Ez Feelin*. I actually stopped drumming for a while then. I was the frontman, the singer with that band. At one stage we had a minor hit with a

played the Japanese style Taiko Drumming and we performed at the opening ceremony of the 2003 Special Olympics in Croke Park. That was a great experience. Around this time I started to study in a place in Nottingham in the UK, called, The Therapeutic Drumming Foundation. I actually ended up doing four years there studying to Diploma level. Therapeutic Drumming involves facilitating Drumming Circles in various settings such as community groups, schools, corporate teams, active retirement groups, special needs settings, hospitals. Therapeutic Drumming promotes the psychological, emotional, social, recreational and spiritual wellness and development of the person. I'm now doing this work for fifteen years.

Q: What would you say was your moment of illumination into the power of Drumming for Wellness?

A: I think I have to say there it wasn't actually a moment. I just always knew, even from a very young age, when I was drumming, I always really felt good. Because I was so young, I didn't think too much about it, but no matter what state I was in – just generally feeling down, depressed, despondent – just connecting with the rhythm seemed to strengthen me some way and gave me a feeling of general wellness and empowerment. Even when I'd practice, I'd leave it feeling rejuvenated, relaxed and more confident in myself.

Q: What are your hopes for the future?

A: My own ambition for the future is to continue doing what I'm doing but I would like to travel a bit more, to study some of the traditional drumming and healing practices in different indigenous cultures around the world, Africa, definitely Asia, South America – all those cultures; and to generally promote as much as possible the use of what I actually call, Recreational Drumming in general health and wellness.

Q: With the way life and the world are today for our young people, and the way our youth are searching for values for life, would you have a guiding message for them?

A: I think it would help greatly if younger people became a little more spiritual and learned to slow down. The world is going far too fast. We've lost contact with the rhythms of nature. For centuries people lived at the same tempo, nowadays technology, whatever the pace of life for humans, has increased enormously and yet the natural rhythms of the world are the same as they were and always will be. We've lost connection with that rhythm. I would suggest to young people to take care of themselves - their holistic wellness – psychological and emotional – and find ways to do that. Drumming is a great way, and there are other ways as well.

For more information:

Check out Eddie's CD *Drum Energy* – original drumming tracks for recreation, motivation and relaxation composed by Eddie. He invites listeners to connect with their inner rhythmical spirit and guides them through the following steps: *energise early in the day; relax, meditate and concentrate; get free from fear, guilt, regret; give thanks for life's gifts; unravel a dilemma and seek guidance.* See www.rhythmretreats.com; email: info@rhythmretreats.com or call **087 9151134**.



as well as doing a degree in London.

"In the University of Arizona, they offered me a place when I was 14. At the time I had lots of other projects going on with my other instruments, but now gradually the harp has taken over.

"I don't think you ever stop learning. There's always something else that you can learn to do.

"Now I'm going from the classical into the jazz and the other genres, like Irish rock."

By day Alida teaches new students the skills of the harp, an instrument she says is relatively easy to pick up.

"We can get a student playing within four or five days. During the summer we did workshops down in the Lanesboro co-op.

"We had players of all ages; some had started a couple of years ago, and were taking it up again. We also had complete beginners and within five days they all performed a concert.

"One thing that's great about the harp when they're starting off is that it's not as bad as the violin – it doesn't sound like a cat being strangled!

"They really get enthusiastic when they hear themselves playing music and not matter what you play on the harp, it sounds really good and gives people a lot of confidence.

"The group we're teaching at the moment is a great group. They've been offered to go to the States, to Canada and now to Hangzhou, which is fantastic. It's a great opportunity for them."

As to her own future, Alida says the learning process will continue.

"Hopefully to become a brilliant performer, and to keep enjoying what I'm doing, learning different things with the harp. Hopefully get my Masters from Arizona, which is down the road a bit."

She embarks on a concert tour next May with her teacher, along with an ensemble of previous students. Starting in Dublin the tour goes through Brazil, Tokyo, Seattle, London and Canada.

M

Harping on . . .

Music in the family

By Neil Halligan

In our last edition we took a look at Mother and daughter harpists. This edition we check in with daughter Alida to see what beckons in the next few months.

As she readily admits, Alida Loftus learned how to walk by pulling herself up with harp strings. The instrument belonged to her mother, Edel, and so it was no surprise that Alida has grown up to be an accomplished multi-instrumentalist, specialising in harp.

At the tender of 18, the Lanesboro musician has seen more than most in a lifetime and it's all through her undoubted musical talent.

China beckoned in October, and with bookings and concert tours right up until 2016, there's little time to relax for the well travelled Alida.

Music is in the blood. Her mother Edel – an outstanding harpist in her own right – runs the successful Windsong Music School in Lanesboro, Co Longford.

Alida has recently returned from Vancouver with her mother, where they attended the World Harp Congress, where "seminars, workshops, all the greats of the world are there," said Alida,

"It was an amazing experience to go over. There were so many different



harpists, with different techniques. It was wonderful to see so many harpists coming together."

Playing an instrument started early for Alida. "I started playing harp when I was five. There were always musical instruments around my house so it was automatic that I was going to be playing.

"I started pulling myself up by the strings to try and teach myself how to walk," she quipped.

"I started violin, cello and piano at six. I've kept them up the whole way," she added.

She also started singing at eight, but it was the harp where her focus remained.

"I started performing with mum when I was six; I did my first concert tour of England when I was six," she revealed.

Studies started early too. "I studied with the Guild Hall in London when I was eight, and graduated a few years ago."

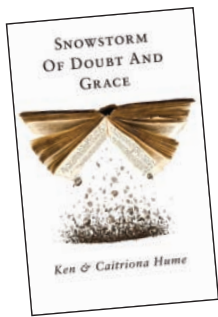
The studies continued and now's she studying with a harp teacher in the University of Arizona through a webcam

UNIFIED: Peter McMorris' *Eternal Embrace* was opened this autumn at Tihilly Housing Scheme, Tullamore.

The work was commissioned by Rights for the Elderly Voluntary Housing Association. The sculpture's design, based on the union of two people is aimed to promote interaction among the residents and the landscaped areas in the development.

A seat is held within the embrace of the figures and thus offers a sense of security and peace. The work encapsulates the spirit of the scheme, from its community based establishment to the residential community housed in the scheme, similarly offering support and shelter to each other. The sculpture is made from stainless steel, cement, ground limestone and pigment.





Tullamore Writer's Debut Collection Launched

Tullamore writer Ken Hume recently launched his debut collection of poetry *Snowstorm of Doubt and Grace*, which also features a collection of new poems by his mother Catriona Hume – one wracked with doubt, the other enamoured by grace.

The book is a collection of poems, lyrics and reflections that are full of contrasts and observations and offer an honest insight into the struggle a writer can experience in having the confidence to be a writer, the doubts that most writers go through but seldom acknowledge on paper or as he says himself, "highly caffeinated, poetic and lyrical observations from 'an awkward boy'."

However, it is not all introspective and there are lighter and more contented offerings which make this a varied and absorbing read.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

KEN HUME is 31 years of age from Tullamore, county Offaly but currently residing in Clara. He was a prolific film and music critic for his local paper, the *Tullamore Tribune* from December 2005 to September 2008.

Snowstorm of Doubt and Grace is his first book.

CATRIONA HUME is also from Tullamore and lives with her husband John. Being a reflective person by nature, she has always found writing a natural means of expression. She has written two booklets called *You Give Me Life* published in 1997 and *On Wings of Love* published in 1998.

The Coffee Shop & Me

By Ken Hume

The coffee shop and me
Met some years ago
When I was walking by
It's portal to another world
The sweet smelling aroma
Grabbed me by the nose
And dragged me inside
To sample it's caffiene delights
And now, we're best of friends
The coffee shop and me
We meet together anytime
To conspire, to commune
In reflective caffeinated bliss
With my notepad and pen
People come and people go
We listen and observe
With outstretched senses
In this coffee shop of ideas

Hide Me

By Catriona Hume

Hide me behind the laurels of the world
Out of sight of would-be-plaudits
Keep me out of view, save that of
knowing my own light
Where is there to hide in a world
That seeks to see itself in its own glory
With little knowledge of whence it came?
Can you find a place for me
Which seeks not to magnify
its own greatness
But knows its place among the stars?
It's there amid the dross of egoism
A treasure hidden in a world
where self's alive
A humble jewel in a world where
soul has died

Copies of the book are available locally in **Chocolate Brown's, William Street & Balcony Books, Bridge Centre** both in Tullamore or on www.originalwriting.ie

Longford Writers' Group Lighting Up the County

From an informal gathering around a fire to the launch of their first publication this year, it has been an interesting 16 years for Lasrai Writers Group.

Having previously been involved with two books under the auspices of the county's arts office, they released their own book, *Kindlings* – a collection of writings from all members.

The group's beginnings are traced back to an informal setting of people sitting around a fireplace, sharing a common love of literature and writing. What sparked the decision to formalise matters and create an official writers' group was a talk given by a famous local author.

"It arose from a reading that was given by Jack Harte from his short stories," explained Margaret Nohilly, the group's Chairperson. "I think he was also detailed to tell us how a writing group worked," she added.

Those who attended on the night were asked to put their name down and so Lasrai Writers Group was born.

Sr Rosari Beirne, who invited Jack to give the talk, explained the name. "We had a little women's centre on the Rathcline Road – it was a group known as Lasrai, the Irish word for lights. We were trying to light the place up.

"We had a little group going – about six or seven – who were writing and then felt a little bit lost. Eventually we invited Jack to formally launch the group," she said.

The group now meet once a month, with each meeting lasting around two hours. The 'rules', as many writer groups know, are simple but important.

"Everybody prepares something – a piece of writing – and reads it at the meeting," said Margaret. "The others then give their criticism or feedback. Through attending readings and workshops we later got the idea of having copies of the poem or piece of writing so people can work on it there and then."

The result is an extremely active group who have members from all over the region, and from all kinds of backgrounds. Budding playwright Paddy Lawrence, and one of the group's newer members, explains that it has helped him bring his work to fruition, with a hope to stage his work on the local, if not national, stage.

"It was difficult because it's my first time to join a group, but I've settled in now. There's a warm atmosphere – I was

expecting it to be harsh, but it wasn't.

"It's been a great help. I've been writing a while and I met Margaret at the launch of *Loose Leaves* (anthology of writing by Longford authors), which is when I joined. I live in Longford town and there was no group there at the time."

In the time he has been with the group, he has completed two plays - one of which has been given to the local Backstage Theatre Group and the other one has been sent to The Abbey.

Mary McGuishin, native of Lanesboro who has recently returned to the area from Dublin, said she joined the group for the sociability. "I didn't want to living out in the field away from life in general. I knew Margaret and she told me about the group. I have enjoyed every bit of it," said Mary, who writes poetry, drawing on her younger days in the area for inspiration.

Sean Cahill, another member, said the atmosphere among the group helps with the writing. "It has a very creative side to it and helps to enrich one's life. We would write poetry and prose, from the sacred to the profane to the sublime, with quite

a bit of humour at times.

"The atmosphere in the group is light-hearted, but at the same time we keep the little bit of writing in focus," he said.

Having been involved with two previous publications by Longford's Arts Office – *Heartlands* and the previously mentioned *Loose Leaves* – their own book was a natural progression.

"It was inspired and motivated by Kieran Furey," Jimmy Casey noted. "He said earlier in the year 'we have all this stuff and we're doing nothing about it and it's about time we get off our backsides and do something about it'.

"He took the responsibility of putting it together. He got about seven or eight contributions from each member of the group and he worked on it and *Kindlings* was what came out of it."

Jack Harte, who also is the Director of the Irish Writers' Centre, returned to launch the book in Lanesboro earlier this year. He has also invited the group to read in the centre in the coming months.

M



Mark Graham, a young man on a Festival Quest to visit three festivals a week in Ireland, has just spent some time in Birr at the OFFline Film Festival. This is an extract from his blog which can be read in full on <http://ayearoffestivalsinireland.com/2011/10/17/high-nellies-tall-tales-short-films-and-beer-sales/>

"The first pub that I walked into had a super-hero sitting at the counter, in full regalia, having a bottle for himself. Birr. It was good to be back.

Most of the festivals that I've been to so far have been dreamt up to promote an area, bring in some bodies and hopefully a few bob. This isn't always a bad thing; The OFFline Film Festival in Birr is one of the first festivals that I've been at where the economics of the affair are dwarfed by a passion for film and a desire to spread the gospel of flickering images.

One of the first indications that there was a festival on in the town were the groups of guerilla camera crews and cast buzzing around the place.

The interesting and somewhat unplanned upshot of this competition is how it involves the community of Birr, who may not otherwise engage with a film festival. People from the town are cast in films, young people watch on bemused as strangely clad characters romp through the street-scape of their home place and cast and crew are invited into townsfolk's homes and businesses to make their films. This brings and immediacy and vibrancy to the streets that would usually be restricted to the venues where the films are being shown or where workshops are taking place. As well as the on-the-hoof film making over the weekend, there is an extensive schools programme that adds further to this sense of community that I wouldn't have associated with film festivals.

I met one of the jury members for the short film making competition, his name is Gabor, an industry magazine editor, critic, producer, foreign film distributor and experienced juror from a number of different festivals including the Berlinale earlier this year; he came all the way from Hungary. I was rapidly becoming impressed with the international feel of this fledgling festival. I asked Gabor was how did Birr compare with Cannes; he earnestly replied that he much preferred Birr, and he wasn't taking the piss! I was messing, but he was quite serious and he justified his answer.

The dedication and effort that all involved in organising this festival gave freely (literally!), to realise an event that seems a great deal more worthy than I imagined a film festival could be, is laudable. Is it possible that a community group in Offaly can organise a festival that has deeper merit and is more laudable than some high profile European film events? Yes they Cannes! "

For more information on OFFline Film Festival see www.offlinefilmfestival.com



Longford Painter makes the Ordinary Extraordinary

By Neil Halligan

Inspiration for artists comes in all forms. Between conversations on a street and a specific, ordinary-looking field, the inspiration for one Longford painter is all around his own locality.

Gary Robinson, operating out of a small studio space in Longford town just off the main thoroughfare, is an accomplished painter of note, drawing praise from many corners, not least renowned artist John Kingerlee.

In trying to describe his current work process, which has evolved over the years, Gary said: "You have to get in to a flow with this kind of work. You have to go through a whole lot of rights and wrongs, and mistakes, before you're able to work properly.

"The work I'm on at the moment, and have been for at least four or five years, is all based on Longford, it's my raw material. I would describe it as reconstructions of every day experiences – taking something that I may have seen or heard experienced by somebody else and using it for this work."

He describes them as being 'Converscapes'. "They're a cross between streetscapes and conversations. Previous to this I was making drawings of Longford streets, which were like OS maps. It was through this process that I thought the only way I could work with any of this kind of material was to have some kind of experience with it.

"So with those maps I developed it further into what people say on the street – 'Converscapes'.

"They're overhead conversations (from the street); I would take snippets of the

conversations back here to the studio, it would be like taking a polaroid of a random conversation. They would be handwritten into the work that I'm making here. The text would become a really big part of it. Joyce said that 'it is through the spoken word that we achieve the universal'.

"You hear the most extraordinary things when you're listening. I transfer those words on to the work here and these works would be buildings, footpaths and blocked-up doorways."

For his most recent exhibition in Dublin, however, the inspiration was drawn from a completely different source.

"It was a different sort of a show. Previous to this all the work that I have done has been on board, where I would be working them intensely for years.



Then a painter friend of mine had suggested that I work on paper."

The work was inspired by a field on the Ballagh Road, just outside Longford town, described as an epiphany by author Belinda McKeon in her essay on Gary's work.

"Something happened when I was looking at this field one morning. I ended up watching this field for about a year and a half, observing the changes in the field, isolating this one field from everything around it. In a way, taking example from it. "I would transfer what I had seen on to paper here.

"Everything I was doing was different. It was an antithesis of what I was doing before. It was completely out of the blue.

"I'm still working on it (the field). There's nothing extraordinary about this field," Gary said, "but as an artist, I feel that is part of my job to look at things that may go un-noticed by other people, it's like making a documentary of the things that you forget about".

Gary has received praise for his work

from all quarters, not least from famed painter John Kingerlee, with whom he has struck up a firm friendship.

Living in West Cork for 25 years, the relationship with English artist started a number of years ago when Gary came across a piece of John Kingerlee's work in a book. He was so taken by it, he felt he had to go about trying to meet him.

Through Kingerlee's publicist, Gary sent on samples of his work. Kingerlee replied with an invite to meet up, and the pair eventually did in Dublin.

"When we met it was like meeting someone I knew from before," recalled Gary. "He's a prolific, internationally recognised painter, and has been painting for 50 years."

Having viewed Gary's work first hand, he says John was kind enough to give helpful feedback on his work.

"A lot of the time with this kind of work, you need a certain amount of confidence to fill your work with what it is you're trying to do. You can lose your confidence very easy.

"There was a book published this year about John Kingerlee and I was asked to write a piece for the book and to contribute a painting. It was a real honour. There were six artists (asked) and Gary was the only painter from Ireland."

At the moment, Gary is working towards another exhibition next year. In between he will have some of his work exhibited in London, Dublin, Cork, Galway and Belfast

"Galleries are being more creative in way they're doing things – running different sort of occasions. I have work going into an art fair in London which would have been something that this gallery wouldn't have done before."





EVEN THE RAINBOW WEEPS

“Art is in the DNA...My Mother was a painter, always painting and making things. Obviously there was no opportunity for her.”

Face-to-**face**

Face-to-Face with sculptor, **MICHAEL BULFIN**

Angela Madden spends an afternoon with Mike Bulfin and discovers he is a scientist and an artist.

Mike Bulfin is now retired – as a scientist that is and now has the time to return to his love of art full time.

Originally from county Offaly Mike tells me that art is in the blood and that he believes it really is in the DNA handed down from generation to generation.

His Grandfather William Bulfin, among other things was an author, penning *Rambles in Éireann* and his mother an artist. “My Mother was a painter, always painting and making things. Obviously there was no opportunity for her.” His Mother hailed originally from Kerry and had the wonderful name Nora Brick, which seems apt as it would appear that she provided the foundations for Mike’s interest in art.

Even when Mike was a young man opportunities to progress in the arts were not many and it was a difficult circle to gain access to in many ways.

As fate had it Mike went off to his studies gaining a Forestry Degree from University College Dublin and then headed to Yale in the US where he completed an Environmental Science Degree – and it seems Mike may well have been the first person in Ireland to complete such a course. It is perhaps ironic that some 40 or so years after he finished this course Ireland and the world have now realised the job in hand to ensure the sustainability of our environment.

It was during his educational studies that his interest in art blossomed. “My sister would take around the galleries;



I really enjoyed that and after a while I thought to myself 'I could do that'."

So Mike is really a self taught artist and influenced naturally by his interest in sustainability and our threatened landscape of forestry and bog.

in science and in art from then."

He went on to say: "Science pays for the art and afforded me the chance to do exactly what I wanted to do in my art."

In fact, Mike feels that the way of



ELECTRON SPIN: OPW Offices, Trim

In many ways Mike was a forefather of arts as it is today as back in the 60s when there was a limited number of galleries in which to show work, he and some other enthusiastic talents formed the Project Arts Centre to afford artists the opportunity to exhibit. "People like John Behan, Michael Kane, John Kelly,

the world means that for most artists whether painters, sculptors, writers, whatever the medium is that nearly all will need a day job as art, in many cases, does not have a high enough value placed on it. However, not relying on your art for a living can create a sense of freedom, said Mike. "Sometimes when money is involved or art commissioned it can sometimes limit an artistic vision."

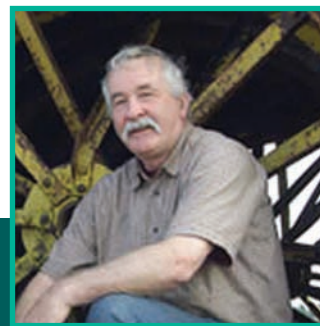
Mike has had long and successful careers in both science and art with a curriculum vitae which has sufficient achievements to make an interesting booklet – and it is impossible to do his career justice here. All we can do is take a look at some of his incredible achievements.

Through his art he has worked or been commissioned across the globe in places as diverse as Budapest, Spain, Liverpool, Copenhagen, London, Paris, Boston, Belfast.

In Ireland his individual works stand all across the country. As an invited artist Mike completed the Devil's Glen Sculpture in Woodland Symposium in county Wicklow; Tir Saile, North Mayo Sculpture Trail; Castlewellingan Sculpture Symposium, Northern Ireland; Slate Quarries Symposium, Kilkenny; West Cork Sculpture Trail; Celbridge Concrete Symposium, Kildare; Arklow Steel Sculpture Symposium but perhaps the one Mike has a special affection for his Sculpture in the Parklands, Lough Boora in his home county of Offaly.

"I grew up in Derrinlough and could see the bog every day and so was familiar with and knew and loved the landscape – the landscape of my childhood." He said that he always remembers the machines that Bord

na Móna brought in to work the bogs: the ditchers, ridgers and trains and decided to use this vision, these memories as his inspiration for Skytrain. Flat on the horizon, I decided to take this image and commemorate



THE ARTIST AT A GLANCE

Mike held solo shows at the Project Arts Centre at its former Dublin locations in Abbey Street and South King Street.

His work has appeared in many group exhibitions including the Irish Exhibition of Living Art; Oireachtas Exhibition; Independent Artists; Aos Óg, Paris (1973); Cork ROSC (1980); *A Sense of Ireland*, London (1980); many Sculptors' Society of Ireland exhibitions; *Skulptur Biennale*, King's Garden, Copenhagen (1990); and *Parable Island*, Bluecoat Gallery, Liverpool (1991).

He has contributed pieces to several environmental art and land art projects, including West Cork Sculpture Trail; Slate Quarries Sculpture Symposium, Kilkenny; Kraakamarken Art in Nature, Aarhus, Denmark;

Castlewellingan Forest Park, Northern Ireland; Tír Sáile, Mayo 5000 Sculpture Symposium and most recently Sculpture in Woodland, at Devil's Glen, county Wicklow.

He has won a number of competitions for public sculpture commissions, including Bank of Ireland Baggot Street, Castlebar Roundabout, and South Dublin County Council Offices, Tallaght. His competition-winning piece *A Walk Among Stone* in Ballymun, Dublin, won the Concrete Society of Ireland Sculpture Award in 1990.

He served as Chairman of the Sculptors' Society of Ireland (1984-1992) and of Project Arts Centre (1972-76), and he has been on the committees of various public art institutions.

There were 24 applications for those two jobs and I got one of them and I have never looked back. I had a dual career in science and in art from then.

Michael Byrne, James McKenna were involved with the starting up of the gallery with the ethos of giving people a chance."

Painting a picture of what life as an artist can be like, Mike explained: "When I finished my degree and started to paint I was on welfare and a man from the social welfare department came to visit me. He said he could not believe where I was living and told me 'If you are to stick at this lark you will be seeing me for the rest of your life'. I always remember that."

And, so Mike said he then saw there were two jobs going at Forstultantis. "There were 24 applications for those two jobs and I got one of them and I have never looked back. I had a dual career

it by translating it into a sculptural context – using the Bord na Móna trains and wagons in a different plane – hence the introduction of the 'rainbow curve'.

to carry turf on horse or donkey. This piece is a celebration of the Bord na Móna machines and the men who operated them".



DERBHILE'S TWIST: Mayo

"To put emphasis on the train going up into the sky, ditcher wheels were introduced to form tunnels in the supporting mound so the light can be seen through it. The engine is a 'Rustin', one of the oldest models and the wagons are of the open creel type, reminiscent of the creels used

Nowadays Mike is working from his studio at home in Dublin and preparing a series of smaller works for exhibition.

In fact, he is now more prolific than ever and seems set to be a key player in the arts in the years to come.

PALANQUIN STILLS

at the Good Hatchery

PALANQUIN STILLS ran for six months to September 2011 at The Good Hatchery

Participating artists were:

Phoebe Dick, Adrian Duncan, Cleo Fagan, Emma Haugh, Louis Haugh, Aine Ivers, Kevin Kirwan, Kathryn Maguire, Elaine Reynolds, Charles Stewart Liberty and Chanelle Walshe

Curators:

Ruth E Lyons and Carl Giffney

Below thoughts from some of the participating artists:



CLEO FAGAN:

"I went to the Good Hatchery in June with artist and fellow curator

Jeannie Guy for four days. Away from our usual daily routines and the lure of the internet we went on walks, enjoyed cooking, eating, yoga and talking. Somewhere in the midst of this we also discussed curating a collaborative educational project which we have since developed together further and just made a funding application on.

For the last day of our project I organised a small screening at The Good Hatchery of visual artist Gillian Wearing's feature length film Self Made. I had previously seen this film in the IFI and wanted to others to see it too. The process of Self Made began in 2007 when Wearing placed an advert in newspapers, online, in job centres and elsewhere which read 'Would you like to be in a film? You can play yourself or a fictional character. Call Gillian'. Like fellow artist and filmmaker Clio Barnard, Wearing imaginatively and excitingly blends fact and fiction to explore personal stories in this compelling and emotionally intense film. Many thanks to The Good Hatchery, Eileen and Fly Film.

PHOEBE DICK:

"At The Good Hatchery I was working on a story in rhyme and image called Like A Marble Rolled.

While on residency there I was primarily writing - in the studio tapping out lines on my typewriter and pensively penciling out or in alterations, pacing around the beautiful courtyard mentally (re)writing and memorising lines, and searching the surrounding woods, fields and boglands for a particular word or turn of phrase I needed.

I climbed Croghan Hill on St Patrick's Day with some of the others involved in The Good Hatchery (and everyone from

the surrounding area it seemed), and spent another wonderfully windy day out in the bog nearby "helping" one of the other artists build a sound sculpture.

I also spent some time engraving plates for printing which illustrate the text (some prints are attached as images). I use the printing facilities at the Leitrim Sculpture Centre and exhibited a selection of first draft illustrations from plates produced at The Good Hatchery at a group print show we organised there in July.

Having the residency at The Good Hatchery allowed me to put Like A

Marble Rolled on the proverbial backburner beforehand and push some other work to completion, and subsequently gave me the confidence to/idea of moving to Manorhamilton for a month to finish the text and work on illustrations. I felt that despite the enjoyable company of everyone I met at and through The Good Hatchery that I still had the physical and mental space I needed to work and am already planning a return trip there to collaborate with some musicians/singer songwriters. Long may it last."

CHARLIE STEWART LIBERTY:

"Bord na Mona, Coillte, Industrial Estate, Two Hundred Year Old Garden, Somewhere, Nowhere - it's all the same. My use of language doesn't seem to reflect reality anymore. It simply recreates itself as fiction - or a metaphysical curiosity. I have begun to liken myself to Kurtz - or maybe just to a latitudinarian anarchist. I simply don't care if it is real or if it is not true - if you say it is, it is, if you say it's not, it's not. Both are so very fine with me - just let me keep trying to do the impossible, to sink and disappear into the essence of what I'm imposing my broken thoughts upon, my short-circuits and missed interpretations. I

render anything I create as useless. This sits well with me. I am trying to become a landscape to further imagine how I could possibly understand the landscape I'm constantly disrupting.

What is correct - to leave a microphone alone, to let a camera record for an hour, to close eyes and wander, to develop and destroy, to record everything, to do nothing at all? To legitimise through some portrayal of frustration, some self-defeating attempt to philosophise existence? In doing all these things I get further away from myself. I see more in a puddle by ignoring it, falling asleep beside it. I get closer to a bird by being

further away from it. The subject is nature, but the pre-occupation is with the nature of things. Or at least it tries to be. Even if it can't."



NEXT ISSUE...

BORN TO DANCE

Brazilian born Erica Borges, Contemporary Dance Teacher, chats with writer Ann Egan.

See full interview in next issue of Midlands Arts & Culture Magazine



Part 1

My Residency in The Tyrone Guthrie Centre

by Ann Egan

The year 2010 had been a very fruitful and fulfilling year for me as a writer; it saw the culmination of a year's work as Laois Writer-in-Residence being celebrated with the Launch of the Laois Echoes With Fionn MacCumhaill, the anthology of stories, poems and songs of six generations of people living in Laois who participated in the Legend of Fionn.



Relating its themes to their own lives, the book marked that poignant meeting place of legend and contemporary life. At the night of the awards' ceremony in Áras an Chontae, Portlaoise, I was awarded The Laois Bursary to The Tyrone Guthrie Centre to afford me the opportunity to create and develop my own writing. So it was with a great sense of anticipation I set on Monday, September 12 to begin my two weeks residency there.

I arrived just after 2pm, having driven in the rising winds of Storm Katia whose gusts were forecast at over 100 miles an hour and I was anxious to be off

the road as soon as possible.

I passed the first sign that read Annaghmakerrig Lake and following detailed and helpful instructions. I continued on until I came to a specific road marking that read L63101 and I knew I was nearing the house. I drove through the quiet shelter of a forest and that led me to a gateway. I entered the code and soon I was driving up a beautiful curving avenue. I arrived at the Big House – the common name given to it here and I was very warmly welcomed by its Director, Robert McDonald and by the staff. I was shown to the most beautiful room

I have ever been in – Lady Guthrie's room, and I began to settle in.

I had a plan of work for my fortnight here. I planned to write a series of poems inspired by the past. I had also brought with me notebooks in which I write on a daily basis; I had them as a fall back. I wanted to make the very best of this marvellous and blessed opportunity gifted to me so my notebooks were with me like familiar friends but a little neglected...

See next issue for Part 2



Have your story covered...

If you have a story or news relating to the arts in the Midlands that you would like to see covered in Midlands Arts and Culture Magazine, contact your local Arts Officer (details opposite).

ARTS OFFICE CONTACTS

Muireann Ní Chonail, Arts Officer
Laois County Council, Portlaoise
Tel: 057 8674342/44 • mnichonail@laoiscoco.ie
www.laois.ie/arts

Sinead O'Reilly, Arts Officer
Offaly County Council, Charleville Road, Tullamore
Tel: 057 9357400 • soreilly@offalycoco.ie
www.offaly.ie/arts

Catherine Kelly, Arts Officer
Westmeath County Council Buildings, Mullingar
Tel: 044 9332140 • ckelly@westmeathcoco.ie
www.westmeathcoco.ie/arts

Fergus Kennedy, Arts Officer
Longford County Council County, Great Water St., Longford
Tel: 043 3346231 • fkennedy@longfordcoco.ie
www.longfordcoco.ie/arts_office.html

Tempus Media and Brosna Press, using their combined expertise in journalism, marketing, design, print and production have created a new-look Midlands Arts and Culture Magazine.

TEMPUS MEDIA

There's never a wrong time to do the right thing

Tempus Media was established at the height of the recession in September 2009 as the founders saw an opening for a top quality, good value media company in a challenging marketplace for business and Government. Midlands-based Tempus Media specialises in five key areas – Publishing/Copywriting, Public Relations, Media Training, Lobbying, and Business Crisis Management.

Editor: ANGELA MADDEN

Angela has more than 15 years' experience in the publishing industry as a Journalist, Foreign Correspondent, Editor, Group Editor and General Manager for trade, local and national press in Ireland and the UK. Angela has excellent local knowledge as she was previously Editor of the Athlone Voice and has an enviable list of contacts throughout the country, built up during her time as Group Editor for 13 River Media newspaper titles. She also has a wealth of experience launching new publications responsible for content, layout and templates having brought a number of new River Media titles to market in '07.

Deputy Editor: BRIEGE MADDEN

Briega is a trained journalist who has worked for local newspapers for close to four years. After attaining her BA Creative Writing & Media Studies degree she started her career at The Athlone Voice before taking up a more senior role at the Cavan Post. She joined Tempus Media in April this year as Business Development Manager and is the lead consultant on a number of important Public Relations contracts. Briega is also an avid poet, short story writer and artist.

For further information contact:
angela@tempusmedia.ie
briega@tempusmedia.ie

BROSNA PRESS

Creative Design and Print

Located in the heart of the midlands, Brosna Press has been providing a nationwide client-base with creative, high quality design and print for over 50 years. Its Irish Print Award acknowledges the company's commitment to the pursuit of excellence in print and creativity in design. Clients in the arts sector include: RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra, RTÉ Concert Orchestra, Music Network, Music for Galway, New Ross Piano Festival, County Council Arts Offices, Dunamase Theatre, Birr Theatre & Arts Centre, Tuar Ard Arts Centre. Brosna Press operate their design studio & print works from a state-of-the-art 12,000 sq ft facility in Ferbane, Co. Offaly.

Creative Director: DIARMUID QUINLAN

Senior Designer: ANN QUINLAN

Production Manager: CIARAN GUINAN

Creative Director Diarmuid Guinan holds a BDes, and has more than 18 years professional experience in graphic design and printing. He manages a highly creative and experienced design team including Ann Quinlan, BDes, Senior Designer, Andrew Moore, BDes, Senior Designer and the highly experienced Mary Egan. Managing Director Ciaran Guinan holds a Diploma in Print Management and has more than 25 years professional experience in the print industry. The production staff at Brosna Press are all highly skilled press operators and print finishing specialists. diarmuid@brosnapress.ie ciaran@brosnapress.ie Tel: 090 6454327



66% of the adult population, approximately 2.3 million people, are arts attendees (meaning attendance at any performance in a theatre, plays, opera, ballet, contemporary dance, classical music events, folk and jazz performances as well as art galleries and exhibitions) 1.5 million people (44% of the adult population) attend once a year or more often Just over 1.2 million people regularly do artistic or creative activities, such as drawing, photography etc. This includes for example: 111,000 participants who attend the 592 events in every county nationwide as part of the Bealtaine festival, celebrating creativity in older age. 30,000 people who attend festivals in Offaly, Laois and Westmeath 455,000 individuals who bought 2.3 million tickets worth €45.7 million for 12,650 events in 59 Arts Council funded theatres, arts centres and festivals. This means that 1 in 3 Irish households bought tickets for arts events in these festivals and venues in 2010. The total of direct, indirect and induced employment in arts council funded organisation and the wider arts sector is 26,519. The total of direct, indirect and induced employment supported by the arts and creative industries is 95,649 jobs. Total Exchequer expenditure on the cultural and creative sector in 2008 was €330 million. Direct Exchequer revenue from the cultural and creative sectors in 2008 was approximately €1 billion.1 Of the €76 million that was used to fund arts organisations and individuals across Ireland in 2007, €54 million was returned directly to the Exchequer in the form of income, VAT and other taxes. Irish Film Board invested €17 million in 36 film, TV and animation productions in 2008 that resulted in €80 million expenditure in Irish economy 1.6 million overseas tourists attended museums/galleries (2010) 80,000 people visited the Book of Kells in two months this year 433,000 overseas tourists attended festivals/events (2010) 27% of Festival audiences are from overseas 18% of tourists visited Ireland because of Irish film in 2008 Cultural Tourism is worth over €2 billion to the economy – both domestic and overseas tourism. Cultural tourism is the only growth area of the tourism market and has continued potential for growth

Sources for this information are www.ncfa.ie (National Campaign for the Arts) *Failte Ireland Cultural Activity Product Usage report for 2010 (provisional figures)* *Failte Ireland Activity Product Usage report for 2010 (provisional figures)* Irish Film Board *Failte Ireland Survey of Overseas Travellers/CSO Travel and Tourism Ireland DKM Economic Consultants for the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism, 2009 Assessment of Economic Impact of the Arts in Ireland, Arts & Culture Scoping Research Project, INDECON, 2009 2010 Annual Audience Benchmarking Survey, Theatre Forum, published June 2011 Arts Audiences 2010, Arts Attendance in Ireland – Target Group Index Report 2009/2010*

UNVEILED: Offaly Artist Michelle O'Donnell recently installed a new public art piece, commissioned by Banagher College under the percent for art scheme www.glasshammer.ie

PUBLIC ART COMMISSIONED FOR GRAND CANAL



In 1960 the Grand Canal closed to commercial traffic and today it is one of Offaly's best natural resources – an artery that should be celebrated for its historical, cultural and social impact on the county. Through a Public Art Commission, Offaly County Council aims to foster the idea of the Grand Canal in Offaly as a Cultural Corridor; for it to become a nationally visible cultural signature of Offaly.

In a call for applications, the brief recognised that the dramatic change of pace journeying along the

Canal, should offer artists opportunities to consider their own practices in a new light, and for the transient contexts to provide inspiration for a series of exciting new works. Some 39 entries were received and following a short listing and interview process, three artists have just been commissioned to make an artwork in response to their journey and experiences along the Grand Canal. Geraldine O'Reilly (from Westmeath) has been commissioned to make a series of prints, Martina McGlynn (Offaly) has been commissioned to make a documentary following writer Eugene O'Brien, musician Wayne Brennan and photographer Veronica Nicholson as they travel along the canal together by barge collaborating and making new work and Susanna Caprara (Dublin) has been commissioned to make a sound piece in collaboration with engaging with communities along the canal. The resulting work will form a collection of artistic responses in a variety of media which will be presented together and tour nationally and will also be on accessible on line. However each artwork will also stand alone and have the potential to continue to disseminate the concept of the Grand Canal as a Cultural Corridor in Offaly.



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

