

Midlands Arts and Culture Magazine

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

AUTUMN/WINTER 2014 • ISSUE 22



THE WRITTEN WORD
MUSIC & DANCE
THEATRE & FILM
VISUAL ARTS

FREE

Midlands Arts and Culture Magazine



A Word from the Editor

What is "culture" and who defines it? According to the Oxford Dictionary "Culture is the arts and other manifestations of human intellectual achievement regarded collectively. The ideas, customs, and social behaviour of a particular people or society."

Is culture something that is celebrated only one day of the year or is it something that is around us all the time? Have we become so blind that we do not see or appreciate what is right in front of us?

The beauty of a concept like Culture Night is that it provides an opportunity for every one of us to open our eyes and our minds to look around us and to celebrate, appreciate and investigate what is available locally.

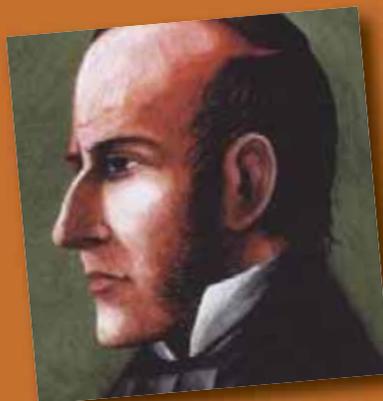
To quote one of the hard working Arts Officers in the Midlands "it's a day and night with so many perspectives, there is the lens of the new audience, people who have not perhaps been in the venues on their doorstep – and this is an invitation to remedy that. It is also about a ground-up day and night of cultural experiences."

Many of the events were organised directly by the arts community themselves, musicians, writers, dancers, visual artists. Throughout the country hundreds of events, workshops, exhibitions and performances were held – all showcasing the work and talent that might not always be visible to the public.

In the midlands we are blessed with a wealth of talent – a fact that is all too often forgotten at national level – a sensitive issue that is discussed with great passion and humour by Manchán Magan in his piece in this magazine, an earlier version of which appeared in The Irish Times and caused some controversy.

As Manchán asks "If we really are a cultural Siberia, an energetic sink-hole how come so many artists, writers and creative types are moving here? Why do the progenitors of artistic elitism swarm down upon us for Electric Picnic in Laois and Body & Soul in Westmeath?" Read his article in full on Pages 22 and 23 and decide for yourself.

Vivienne Clarke of Acumen Media, Editor



JAMES FINTAN LALOR AUTUMN School 2014

Join us for a weekend of, debates, exhibitions and political discussion inspired by the writings of James Fintan Lalor. This Autumn School will be a fitting tribute to a significant national figure who engaged directly with the political climate of his time, fighting for land rights on behalf of the oppressed farming community and the working classes.

Contributors at this year's event include: Charlie Flanagan, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Micheal Martin, TD, Sean O'Rourke, Eoghan Harris, Noeline Blackwell, Pat Moylan, Regina Culleton, Fr. Peter Mc Verry, Michael Starret, Brendan Flynn, Mary Carroll, John Lonergan, Aine Lawlor, Sharon Foley, Mary Carroll and others.

The James Fintan Lalor Autumn School 2014 will take place in the Dunamais Arts Centre, Portlaoise on the 17th and 18th October, 2014.

Booking box office: 057 8663555 or online www.dunamais.ie or for more details visit the website: For more info visit the website: www.jamesfintanlalor.ie

James Fintan Lalor Autumn SchoolPage 2

Ring Around The MoonPage 3
Music Generation Offaly

Gemma Lalor • Little Blue Room.....Page 4

Revive Moneygall • Laois Arts PlanPage 5

Artemis Fowl Author Approval.....Page 6

Robyn Byrne.....Page 7

Screen Shots by Paddy SlatteryPage 8
Anne Skelly Tribute

A Nightingale FallingPage 9

Gordon Wycherly Profile.....Page 10/11
Engage Longford

Poet Denise O'NeillPage 12

Fergal Mccabe ExhibitionPage 13

Brendon Deasy • Iron Man.....Page 14/15

Doodle; Postcards from CulturePage 16

Roesy's New Album • Maria ResidencyPage 17

Culture Night 2014 in the MidlandsPage 18/19

Music Generation Laois • Eileen MoynihanPage 20

Emerging Artists Longford • Marina CarrPage 21

Manchán Magan on the.....Page 22/23
Arts In The Midlands

Acting Shakespeare • Taking It By DegreesPage 24

Richie Clarke WoodcarverPage 25

Mullingar Cathedral Mosaics.....Page 26/27

Moate Choir • My Cello My VoicePage 28

Avril CoroonPage 29

Fascination with FabricPage 30
Westmeath Arts Project

Stage PresencePage 31

Orbus TheatrePage 32

Literary Leaves • Bright Light Extinguished.....Page 33

Canvas to Catwalk; Foundation 14.....Page 34
Mentoring Opportunities

Nick Sitting Documentary • Rural Charm.....Page 35

Fabulous BeastPage 36

BOOK IN SIDES

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Ring Around the Moon ANTHOLOGY



Earlier this year, Longford County Arts Office facilitated a 10-week Writers Mentoring Programme at Templemichael College in Longford town under the stewardship of writer Alan McMonagle and poet Noel Monaghan. Large numbers of budding local scribes applied, with the 10 successful candidates in each discipline eventually being chosen on merit.

"We met with them once a week from 7.30pm to 9.30pm," explains Noel Monaghan, who has himself published five collections of poetry to date. "The programme dealt with all aspects of poetry writing, including poetic inspiration, responding to a poem, finding a form, arranging work, rhythm and line breaks, editing, and how to get published."

The writing category was similarly detailed, with writer Alan McMonagle adding that, "among the topics covered were finding a voice, openings, constructing characters, dialogue, setting, engaging the reader, conflict, point of view, endings, editing, and presentation. That was the broad outline, but we did stray from time to time."

Now that the course has concluded, writing submitted by the participants is now being collated for inclusion in an anthology, which will be launched this autumn.

"We held a competition among the participants to find a name for the anthology," Longford County Arts Officer Fergus Kennedy says. "The winning entry was 'Ring Around the Moon', which was submitted by Breda Sullivan. The title was chosen for its lyrical quality, for the way it reflects the soaring imaginative quality of much of the work contained in the anthology, and for the visual possibilities that it presents to the visual artists who will compete for the design cover. As her prize for winning the competition, Breda will receive €50, as well as having a naming credit in the anthology."

'Ring Around the Moon' was launched at Thursday, October 2nd, which quite aptly was National Poetry Day, with the event starting at 8pm in the Backstage Theatre's Canal Studio in Longford town.

BANKING ON INSTRUMENTS

Music Generation Offaly/Westmeath has announced that it has successfully secured circa €48,000 from Westmeath Community Development to purchase 550 instruments for its new Play an Instrument Outreach Programme.

"This is exciting news, which means that we can progress with the second phase of the roll out of our music education programme for young people," Margaret Broome Development Officer remarked, "We know that one of the main barriers to music education is affordable musical instruments, so this allows beginners to experience an instrument without a prohibitive initial investment by parents."

The range of instruments being purchased includes classroom starter kits of guitars, drumkits and keyboards and also a range of instruments for smaller group tuition, which includes violins, violas, flutes, clarinets, saxophones and trumpets.

The inventory of instruments was well researched and chosen to lend themselves well to two complementary styles of instruction, which, when operating in conjunction with each other, will ensure a high use and reach of the instruments. The Play an Instrument Outreach Programme will operate from a wide variety of contexts including primary and secondary schools, afterschool programmes, disability groups, arts venues and community facilities.

"Music Generation aspires to be able to say that every child across Offaly and Westmeath received the chance to play an instrument", continued Margaret.

"We expect that this bank of instruments will cater for approx 340 young people in each academic year. At this time, because funding has come from Westmeath Community Development, the bank of instruments is only for use by young people in

rural Westmeath. We are actively identifying other sources of funding to ensure that we can offer the same service in Offaly in time. However, this is a great start and we will build upon it," continued Margaret.

For more information on Music Generation Offaly/Westmeath contact Margaret Broome on mbroome@offalycoco.ie or 057 9357400





Magically Overactive **IMAGINATION**

The Arthouse Gallery, Stradbally Co Laois will host a magical exhibition in October by a young local artist, Gemma Lalor from Portlaoise. Gemma does evening work for An Post enabling her to work on her passion during the day.

“All my work is from my imagination as it tends to run wild all the time and from what my dreams are made of. I love to play on words and create images from everyday phrases or sayings and just on thoughts and ideas that run through my head. My work is not very conventional, but neither am I. My art is fun and for people of all ages, I want young and old people to enjoy it. In each of my pieces there are strong messages that can only be found when the viewer stops and takes time to observe what is going on”

Gemma is delighted to be exhibiting at the Arthouse Gallery for the month of October, where she can open up her world of imagination to the public. The work on exhibition will be a collection of mixed media, charcoal, pencil and paintings and Gemma hopes to include a collection of sculptures

of characters from her paintings.

Gemma attended Abbeyleix VEC, for two years and completed courses in Art Craft and Design Fetac Level 5 and Art and Business Fetac Level 6. Having secured a place in Crawford Art College Gemma took the decision to forgo this and follow her own path as an Artist. Gemma let her passion for creating images from her imagination take over and this led to her holding her first very successful solo exhibition at Laois Shopping Centre, Portlaoise in a free shop unit space. The exhibition was so well received she gained confidence in her work and entered an outdoor art competition in Belfast where her work was selected and displayed in the central Train Station. Gemma has exhibited in Abbeyleix Library, Mountmellick Library and The Pantry Restaurant in Portlaoise. Gemma also has a very

popular facebook page with up to 3000 followers and she has received messages from fans as far as Malaysia and beyond complimenting her work. Find Gemma on Facebook under **Magically Overactive Imagination/Gemma Lalor**.

The exhibition will run from 2pm to 4pm Tuesday and Thursday and 10am to 1pm on Saturdays. Access to the Gallery through the Library on Court Square, Stradbally.

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

- www.arthouse.ie
- www.facebook.com/thearthouseandlibrary
- [@ArthouseLibrary](https://www.facebook.com/ArthouseLibrary)

New venue for performing arts in Longford town



Longford town has a new venue geared towards original music acts, small theatrical productions, stand-up comedy, and other performing arts. Run on a non-profit basis by a group of volunteers, The Little Blue Room is planning to stage performances a couple of times a month at first.

“Our aim was to create an intimate atmosphere in the style of a cabaret venue,” reveals Shane Crossan, who first had the idea for the project. “There’s a well-lit stage for the performers, chairs and candle-lit tables for the audience, and we also have table service so no one has to leave their seats to order a drink!

The Little Blue Room can hold approximately 50 people and the cover charge for most events is just €5. And in association with local film-making group Outtake Films, the venue can also film performances and post them online as a means for the artists to showcase their work. Attached to John Browne’s pub on the town’s Market Square, the performance space debuted

during the Cruthú Arts Festival, which took place over the August Bank Holiday weekend.

“We had quite an eclectic line-up over the course of that weekend,” Shane explains. “We hosted a performance of Seamus O’Rourke’s new one-man play – ‘Padraig Potts’ Guide to Walking – and the Moogles Theatre Company debuted their latest short play, ‘Intentions’. As for music, we had original music from Arrow in the Sky, Fiona Maria Fitzpatrick, and plenty of local talent, and on the last night we had a fantastic bluegrass band called The Breadwinners.”

Going forward, it’s hoped the Little Blue Room will be able to host a wide range of performances.

“Our aim is to host exciting, original shows on a regular basis,” Shane added.

For more information on the Little Blue Room, visit its Facebook page: www.facebook.com

a REVIVAL in MONEYGALL



Gallery Revival in Moneygall is immediately curious and welcoming; the antique typewriter in the window holds a faded typed notice as to what's inside, defying the contemporary painting and photography inside but offering a clue towards the corner of curios and handmade crafts also for sale.

Gallery Revival is run by photographer Joseph-Philippe Bevilard and his partner Jean Morgan. "We both have a passion for art, antiques and appreciate the talented craft workers and artists in this country, we found the perfect premises in picturesque Moneygall, and we knew the timing was right," Joseph Philippe explains. "The concept of Revival comes from how people lost heart with the recession and talented people were leaving the country, we want to help encourage a place for art in our lives."

Joseph Philippe has an Irish mother, was born in Boston but was adopted by French parents. He has been an artist of all media since losing his hearing at a very early age. He studied fine art and photography in the Rochester IT in New York and the Art Institute of Boston. He left Boston in 2000 to move to Ireland. When not working in the gallery he is busy working on his own photographic projects and teaching.

The exhibition schedule at Gallery revival will change every month, with solo and group exhibitions. The Gallery will regularly issue calls for submissions, or artists are also welcome to contact the gallery to rent the space for workshops, lectures or book signings. If you wish to be placed on their mailing list contact and follow Gallery Revival on Facebook.

Laois looks to the future of the Arts

"Sustain, Nurture, Grow" is the title and theme of the fourth Laois Arts Plan 2014-2017 which was launched recently.



This plan is the result of a review the Arts Office undertook and its response to the challenges presented with the current economic environment. The Laois Arts Plan, 2014 – 2017, is the fourth Arts Plan to be implemented by Laois County Council. Although the plan was devised and written during economically challenging times when resources are scarcer than previously, a solid foundation has been built for the arts in Co Laois in the last twenty five years. This Arts Plan will offer a pathway to consolidate and nurture programmes and strategies already established by the Arts Office in its 2006-2011 Arts Plan. The need for greater partnership is the key to enhancing the arts developments in the county and the current Arts Plan also offers scope for embracing new ideas for partnerships, and in further developing the work done with artists, people and creative communities.

Since the last Arts Plan exciting developments have taken place in the county. These include the opening of the Laois Arthouse in 2011, in Stradbally. This facility offers national and international artists the opportunity to work and stay in a beautiful environment with

excellent facilities and comfort. Another new development is Music Generation Laois. Music Generation Laois, enhances the existing Laois School of Music established in 2001, under a previous Arts Plan, offering a wide range of musical tuition to hundreds of people countywide on a weekly basis.

The Arts Office has in its overview looked at how it utilises precious resources available to it. One of the ways is through thoughtful use of the Percent for Art Scheme. This programme has enabled the funding of residencies and commissions and will continue to do so through the lifetime of the plan.

The Arts Office is focussing on greater partnership with the Dunamais Arts Centre, in devising programmes, as evident in the current Arts Council Theatre Residency programme currently taking place.

The Arts Plan will also look to further develop investment in various programmes that focus on young people and the place of the arts in education and youth culture. Already a successful Youth Theatre

programme is run by the Arts Office and it is hoped to develop this further in the lifetime of the plan.

"Sustain, Nurture, Grow" Laois Arts Plan 2014-2017, heralds an exciting time for the arts in county Laois. Whilst the financial resources prove challenging to find, the Arts Office will drive the implementation of the Arts Plan and its evaluation for future learning.

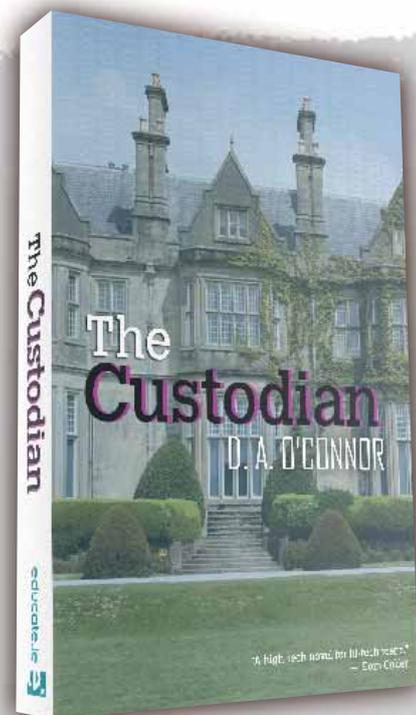
Advisor to the plan was Clíodhna Shaffrey and design of the plan was by Laois born Graphic Designer, Caitríona Maher. Thanks is extended to all those who contributed to the plan, the Members, Management and Staff of Laois County Council for their continued support.

The Arts Plan is available to download from the website www.laois.ie and a limited number of hard copies are available from the Laois Arts Office.

Further information from Muireann Ní Chonaill, Laois Arts Officer, at muireann@laois.ie and telephone: 0578664109.

ARTEMIS FOWL AUTHOR Applauds *The Custodian*

Eoin Colfer, the author of the popular Artemis Fowl series, has described *The Custodian* as “a high-tech novel for high-tech teens, the nail-biting suspense and believable characters make a winner.”



So who is DA O'Connor, author of the *Custodian*? Aliases have been used by authors as long as books have been around, but a debut novel from one DA O'Connor does more than hide a single literary identity. The author of a new young adult book, *The Custodian*, is in fact a group of Offaly school children and their principal, Frank Kelly from Durrow National School outside Tullamore.

“Once the children agreed to the project, their first task was to write a letter to their mentor, me, dated 8 months into the future thanking me for making published authors out of them. That, for me was the biggest risk. If it is one thing I have learned in my years teaching, it is the absolute need to follow through on your promises to children,” explained Frank Kelly.

The eight sixth-class pupils combined their literary talents and knowledge of young adult fiction to create an entertaining thriller aimed at an audience of their peers. Having ran a study group for older pupils on the mechanisms of fiction for the past number of years, Kelly decided to take the process one step further this year and encouraged the group to create their own novel.

“It was an amazing collaborative process,” says Kelly. “The aim was to take the best techniques they could find in their studies and write their own full-length novel, brim full of everything that would appeal to boys and girls their own age, such as theft, phone hijacking, shop lifting, drug abuse and the constant, irritating interjections of a 200-year-old ventriloquist’s dummy, a stroppy teenager and a bully, all combined to keep things moving at break-neck speed!”

The Custodian tells the story of Matt, a 12-year-old boy whose life is falling apart. His sister is mean to

him, his mother won’t get out of bed, and he hasn’t seen his father since his family was kidnapped in a tiger raid. With school bullies after him and night-time visits to Durrow Abbey, Matt ends up in a series of risky escapades that involve computer hacking and efforts to save the Irish crown jewels from a desperate criminal gang.

The Swallows Nest said *The Custodian* is an amazing example of what can be achieved when children learn to channel and discipline their creativity with the assistance of a truly great teacher. This astonishing novel was written in five months, during which time its youthful writers all had other schoolwork to do and their guide and mentor, the remarkable Frank Kelly, was also engaged in the always challenging task of running a primary school. Very few writers could produce a 263-page novel in this time frame, much less one as well-written and exciting as *The Swallows Nest* strongly recommends for readers aged 10 and over who enjoy stories about adventure, crime, high-tech escapades, fantasy and teenage travails.”

“In the first 2 months we have sold 3,000 copies. It was a totally absorbing exercise,” concluded Frank, “who knows where the story of *The Custodian* will take us yet? For now we would just like you to read it!”

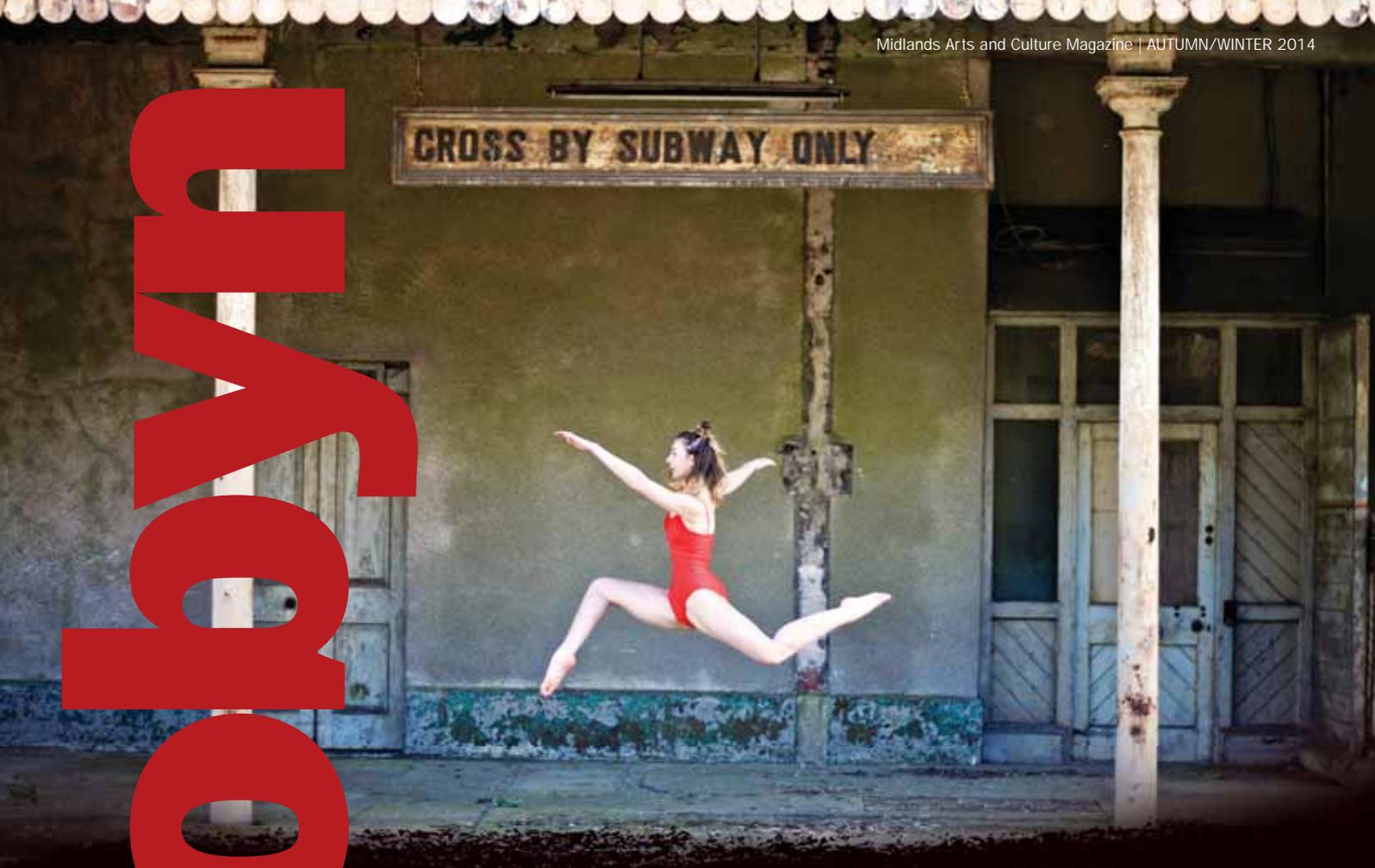
The Custodian also comes with an accompanying workbook and is available from most bookshops. It is available online from educate.ie (along with its accompanying workbook).

The profits from *The Custodian* will go towards the building of a new gymnasium at Durrow N.S.

A cracking, pacy tale of real adventure in the heart of Ireland with dazzling plot twists - CLAIRE O'BRIEN, OF MIDLANDS 103

An astonishing novel ... ideal for young people who enjoy stories about crime, high-tech escapades, fantasy and teenage travails - THE SWALLOWS NEST CHILDREN'S BOOKS SITE.

“The *Custodian* is an amazing example of what can be achieved when children learn to channel and discipline their creativity with the assistance of a truly great teacher.”



ROBYN BYRNE

Westmeath dancer Robyn Byrne has been selected to join 'Verve' the coveted post-graduate Performance Company of the Northern School of Contemporary Dance. Byrne's career compass seems set for success, yet the Mullingar twenty two year old wears her affection for the midlands, where her passion for dance was born, with admirable pride.

Each year 12 talented dancers are selected for the Verve collaborative programme. Within the programme a group of leading choreographers work with the students to produce a dynamic bill of contemporary dance works. The students work with the choreographers over the year, developing four works that are truly fresh and unique. The company then tours the work between March and June to a diverse range of professional venues throughout the UK and selected European cities.

Twenty two year old Robyn Byrne is clearly a star on the up. She is from an artistic family and says "she was always surrounded by music and singing growing up". At eight, during an after-school activity class she met Anica Louw, the artistic director of Shawbrook School of Dance in Longford. An immediate connection to dance was sparked and Byrne went on to train at Shawbrook for many years, first in ballet and then later contemporary dance. Being introduced to a broad range of choreographers and professionals through workshops and classes at Shawbrook, Byrne made the choice to further pursue contemporary dance.

At sixteen Robyn was invited to the renowned Cathy Sharp Dance Ensemble in Switzerland. Sharpe was a hugely accomplished soloist with the Basel Ballet. Moving to Leeds in 2011 Byrne took a place at The Northern School of Contemporary Dance on a degree in Contemporary Dance. Unsurprisingly, she graduated earlier this year with a first class honours whilst also being awarded with the Carolyn Woolridge award for outstanding performer.

Contemporary dance is an open dance form, often without defined narrative or linear structures Like abstract art it often communicates in a way that leaves room for - if not demands that - the audience itself participates or draws its own conclusions. Drawing on classical ballet and modern dance many aspiring professional dancers are drawn to the unusual combinations contemporary dance presents: the ever present unpredictability 'held' alongside technique, the nods to anarchy never far removed from fragility. Like the dance form she has selected - Byrne is open and adaptive to other art forms and experiences: recently she collaborated with Mullingar photographer Emma Gorman on a project that combined photography and dance elements, drawing on Mullingar's history, culture and nature as a backdrop. The project saw the duo using locations such as the old railway station and Lough Owel (cover shot) to photograph Byrne performing.

With the 'Verve' Performance company, Byrne will be working with four accomplished choreographers, Kerry Nichols, Lucas Silvestrini, Douglas Thorpe and Theo Clinkard, and a core component of the learning will be the delivery of workshops to other young dance students along the way. Byrne has a genuine interest in teaching and this is something she sees as an authentic part her own career evolution. If, as Martha Graham the American pioneer of modern dance put it "dance is the hidden language of the soul", Byrne is already an accomplished linguist.

SCREENSHOTS

Paddy Slattery writes about his encounter with the 2014 Galway Film Fleadh and finds equal measures of inspiration and deflation.

I felt inspired and deflated after this year's Galway Film Fleadh. Thankfully not in equal measures as there were so many exciting reasons to come away from the festival feeling refreshingly exhausted, if that's even possible.

There were many highlights, having our film *Skunky Dog* screen to a very appreciative audience, seeing the premieres of some extraordinary films and catching up with lots of filmmaker friends and even form some new connections. It was a truly memorable week and I found myself back to work feeling motivated and optimistic. However, there was one thing that struck me and the reason I was left feeling a little deflated.

I saw some extraordinary films at the festival. Films that were made on shoe-string budgets yet brilliantly executed. Films that, in my opinion, carried universal themes of love, loss, deception, regret and so on; stories told in surprisingly new ways, boasting Oscar-worthy acting performances - yet, films that may never be seen outside of a festival environment because our film industry has not mastered the ability to market or distribute them and these films do have an audience, worldwide.

Bottom line? They have no "big name" actors involved, nor do they have a formulaic theme tailored for a mainstream audience in order to sell the film and get "bums on seats". In other words - they just cannot

compete with the blockbuster junk that's churned out by the big studios. We are witnessing "The Dawn of the Rising" of the franchise, tent-pole popcorn movies which are breaking box-office records as we speak, yet, the filmmakers who are creating profound, thought-provoking, educational and inspirational films are struggling to make a living.

Am I just a naïve beginner with no idea how the wheels of this industry turn? Perhaps. Nevertheless, I will watch more amazing films, get even more inspired and knuckle down, work my ass off and dream the dream, that one day, a film of mine will blow audiences minds, inspiring generations to look at the world in a whole new light. Perhaps there's hope?

One of the films I saw in Galway was 'A Nightingale Falling'; a beautiful yet tragic period drama, produced and directed on a shoestring budget by Garret Daly and Martina Mc Glynn (fellow Offaly filmmakers!) who performed miracles by putting, what looks like a fully funded film, up on screen. Extraordinary achievement and if I won the lotto, I would write them a seven figure cheque for their next feature! This screening sold out and had an encore screening in the IMC. To learn since that they have since achieved a nationwide release is nothing short of remarkable in this market, yet wholly and absolutely deserved.

The sad truth is, more Irish films deserve to be seen by

audiences around the world! Let's figure this out lads, get our thinking caps on and get these films to their final destination. Why create these masterpieces if, for the most part, the only ones seeing them are our friends and family? This is an issue that should be dealt with by those at the "top" of the film industry ladder. We need balance in this industry just like we need balance in our lives and industry in general. Technology is creating new markets every day with screening platforms everywhere. Let's do this!!"

Skunky Dog tells the tragic story of Flick, starring Ryan McParland and Lacy Moore. Written and Directed by James Fitzgerald and Produced by Paddy Slattery



Tribute to local writer by Ballymahon Writers Group

Many writers inspire through the power of their writing. A lesser number have a gift for teaching. Fewer still have a passion to stimulate and nurture those around them. Our friend and colleague Anne Skelly, who passed away in March this year after a long struggle with cancer, was one of those.

We in Ballymahon Writers Group know only too well how important she was to local writing. She undertook many of the often-thankless organisational tasks that keep writing groups alive and vibrant. She admonished us, educated us, shared her work with us, and delighted with us when our writing received wider acknowledgment.

Just how highly she was regarded within the County - and beyond - was clear at the launch of her debut

novel 'Foolish Pride' in 2011, when Longford Library was packed beyond capacity by those who she had inspired and supported over the years, and who had turned out to help her celebrate that momentous achievement.

Her passing is keenly-felt. But her legacy is that we remember what she brought to us and draw inspiration and encouragement from that memory.

'Out of the Shadows' is a testament to that. Inspired by Anne's account of her struggle with cancer, 'Out of the Shadows' is a collection of sixteen searching, sharp-eyed stories and poems on the themes of love and loss, resilience and hope. The collection has been produced by the Ballymahon Writers Group, and includes contributions from Brian Leyden, Noel Monahan, and writers groups across Counties

Longford and Westmeath. The collection will be launched in Ballymahon Library, Co Longford, on Friday, October 10th, by well-known author Brian Leyden. All proceeds from the sale of the book go to the South Westmeath Hospice, Athlone, in recognition and with heart-felt thanks for their care of our friend Anne.



OFFALY FEATURE FILM GETS GENERAL RELEASE



A Nightingale Falling, based on the novel by PJ Curtis, is a new historical feature drama set against the backdrop of a turbulent, war-torn Ireland in the early 1920's. It is a story of a household and its inhabitants caught in the crucible of the merciless politics, cruelties and hardships of the period. It is also a story of love, and the dark secrets that lead to broken hearts.

But this film tells another story, how a low budget Irish feature film can go from an encore performance at its premiere at the Galway Film Fleadh to general release within 8 weeks!

Shot almost entirely in Offaly, on a micro budget where local directors and producers Martina McGlynn and Garret Daly of Mixed Bag Media pulled out every stop and pulled in every favour to make this film a reality.

"It's a brilliant story. We were drawn to it because this period is so rooted in Irish Culture and History", commented filmmakers Garret Daly and Martina McGlynn. "We think it will resonate with many people because we've all heard stories of from The War of Independence and how it divided families and communities. This is such a story, and it deals with that period from one families point of view"

This included, for the first time ever, the Ulster Orchestra recording the full film score, joining only

a handful of film scores to be recorded entirely in Ireland. With support from Northern Ireland Screen, the score was specially written by Donegal-born composer Graeme Stewart for *A Nightingale Falling* who likened the score to "an emotional spectator of the film. I got involved in the film after watching the trailer and I just thought it looked like a really beautifully shot film; I was blown away by what Mixed Bag Media has created from PJ Curtis' book," Stewart said.

The Film Ireland review of *A Nightingale Falling* praised Daly and McGlynn for delivering, "a fine film which focuses on the effect of a nationwide crisis on one particularly family. Beautifully directed and brilliantly acted, *A Nightingale Falling* is a moving, authentic piece of cinema about a turbulent period in Irish history where loyalty and trust were for many the only means of protection. Towards the end of the film there comes a twist that will throw even the most experienced filmgoer."

Tara Breathnach gives a fine performance as the older and more authoritative May while Muireann Bird is equally impressive as the younger, more excitable Tilly, whom the audience gets to see mature before their eyes. The most effective scenes are early on when the sisters are slyly vying for the affections of a wounded British Soldier (Gerard McCarthy), without any direct confrontation on the matter apart from the looks they exchange when one catches the other alone with him. The film also doesn't shy away from the tragic loss of life in this era, as well as the desperate actions of those trying to get away unscathed.

The film also stars Elliot Moriarty, Brian Fortune, Andy Kellegher, Rose Henderson, Michael James Ford, Blathnaid Ryan and Mark Tankersley.

The film is on general release in Irish cinemas this autumn



GORDON WYCHERLEY Q&A

Westmeath based Location Manager Gordon Wycherley chats with Westmeath Arts office about his childhood affection for all things film – and the varied role of the Location Manager. Thus far in 2014 Wycherley has worked on the Irish film ‘Brooklyn’ which is based on the Colm Toibin novel of the same name and stars Saoirse Ronan and Domhnall Gleeson. He is currently working on a German TV Drama Series about a Scotland Yard detective investigating murders in the English country side.

Are you a cinephile, have you always loved film and telly?

Yes I have always had a great interest in film. We only had two channels on TV in West Cork when I grew up so cinema opened up a whole new world of entertainment for me. Much of my time in University in Dublin was spent watching films in cinemas like the Savoy.

What were your favourite shows growing up?

Growing up I was mad about watching Westerns on Television and James Bond movies in the cinema.

What’s your guilty pleasure TV viewing?

Tricky question...but if I was on my own and there was to be a countdown of the 50 greatest or the 100 greatest of pretty much anything I would probably watch it, but particularly if it was sports or film related: greatest films, greatest world cup goals, greatest rugby tries, greatest GAA hurling and football goals - that sort of thing

If you could pick one film or tv series and time travel was an option, what would you like to have been the Location Manager on?

Dr. Zhivago. The breadth and scope of the locations was amazing, shot in different seasons,



an epic undertaking. To have been a Location Manager on that would have been some experience. A close second would have to be Lawrence of Arabia, but the heat would have killed me!!

What do foreign films, cast and crew coming into the country like about Ireland, beyond the incentives and tax arrangements?

They all like the fact that we speak English. They also like that we have very experienced crews; that we have very talented actors and the fact that we have a huge range of interesting locations that are generally easily accessible. Many Producers who I have dealt with over the years have told me that they like working in Ireland; they like the people and the way of life and sometimes that they have chosen Ireland for their production even when other eastern European or Asian Locations would have been more cost effective.

What does the role of a Location Manager look like? What might a typical day look like?

The one thing about Film Location Management is the variety and scope of the job...no day is the same. I could be working on a TV advert, a TV drama, a feature film or even fashion and music videos. All can be very different and challenging in many ways. In the preparation period for a film or a TV shoot you are driving up and down roads searching for the locations, knocking on doors, doing recce's with the Director and the Art Department. During the actual shoot you can be on Location from really early in the morning until late in the evening, sometimes you can be doing night shoots, some days you are filming on a street and other days you are on a cliff or half way up a mountain.

A Location Manager not only finds the locations. He/she also has to secure the locations by engaging with location owners and signing Location contracts with them; dealing with permissions from county councils; liaising with Gardai; organising road closures; organising security for each location; organising parking of facilities vehicles etc etc .It is a multi faceted job.

Tell us something we mightn't know about the work of a location manager.

Very long hours. Sometimes first there in the morning and last to leave in the evening.

Moving from all the planning at pre production stage, into the hectic-ness of the filming / production stage must be a significant gear change for the Location Manager?

That's when it really gets started and when it gets really busy and the days are long and sometimes arduous. In the preparation period for a production you may be searching for locations for up to two months in advance of filming. Sometimes this is the best part of the job. But when the filming starts you are constantly keeping ahead of the crew as you have to prepare and pave the way for them with regard to permissions and access. You also have to track back after they have been to a location to make sure that all is in order. Something may need sorting out after filming and that is all part of the job. Location Managing is all about planning ahead and tracking back.

Film Offaly has been successful in attracting productions to locate in the County, is there more that can be done by the wider region to enhance the attractiveness of the midlands to productions?

I think it is important to have the midlands and

all it has to offer showcased as well as possible on the internet so that it gives the midland region the best chance of attracting productions here. I think it would be good if there was a proper, serious cataloguing of midland locations so that Producers and Production companies can refer to this on the internet. If this were in place then the midlands could definitely attract more film and TV production in to this region. The film industry needs to be made aware of the large estate houses, the castles, the lake, river and bog-land landscapes in this region, as well as many other kinds of locations that are on offer in this region. This would be the first positive step I think and somehow linking this website of knowledge to the Irish Film Board website.

Best thing about being a location manager?

The variety of different situations you find yourself in; and the huge range of people you meet along the way.

Worst thing about being a location manager?

Dealing with a grumpy resident who has some grievance about our filming, for whatever reason. It's always a tricky situation but it's part of the job and you have to engage and listen to their grievance and possibly then find a resolution to the problem.

Any advice for aspiring film professionals interested in location work reading this article?

Be persistent. Getting in to the business can sometimes be daunting for those on the outside. But if you really want to do location work in Film then I suggest giving a Location Manager a call. We are always happy to help and the Irish Film Board will have a list of all Irish Location Managers.

Celebrating Culture Night at ENGAGE LONGFORD

Engage Longford held its second annual Culture Night exhibition in the old Providers premises on Main Street in Longford on Friday, September 19. The show coincided with events taking place nationwide on the same evening, and also marked the first anniversary of the local group's establishment.

"The exhibition will run for 10 days and admission is free," said Gary Robinson of Engage Longford. "Our plan is to exhibit a selection of artists that work in different mediums, i.e. painting, digitally-printed imagery, wall-based ceramic installations, and interactive

floor-mounted installations. The artists are from Limerick, Longford, Wexford, and London, and there are more to be confirmed. We also have a category for secondary level students.

"We are inviting all the local secondary schools to visit the exhibition and to meet with some of the artists," he continued. "This proved to be very successful last year, its beneficial to both students and artist."

Gary went on to say that one of the ideas behind Engage Longford is to open up the accessibility of art to the general public in Longford, giving

everyone the experience of visiting an exhibition and to make it part of the fabric of society. "Artists live and work in our communities," he explained. "Many people are unaware of this, so we are trying to inform and educate in this regard. Art is something that we all should experience, in much the same way as we experience sport or any kind of social gathering."

Engage Longford's Culture Night exhibition is co-funded by County Longford Arts Office and Culture Night 2014.



The Simplicity of Life:

Westmeath poet Denise Terry O'Neill reviews and reflects on past creations and something new...

'The Simplicity of life' is a poem from a book published in 2013, 'View Through the Eye of the Heart', a compilation of inspirational words and pictures that I created whilst rearing my four children in Westmeath. A year on, I reflect and let go. I die to it so that my words and images can be reborn in your mind. In getting out my thoughts in this way I am able to not judge, but accept everything that I went through during those times - the experience of being a 'Blow-in' - the nurturing and rearing of my family - the pleasures and challenges of being in a different country - exploring the wonders steeped in the landscapes and shapes of Ireland.

I look back at the seemingly endless shuffling of my time, taxiing, waiting around for pick-ups and domestic life. Children truly bring you into the moment, constantly requiring full attention. As an Artist this can feel claustrophobic, my way of surviving was to take 'time-out'. I rejoice in that I have come through this time with a plethora of writings, drawings, paintings and sculptures. Reading back the words of this poem, re-ignite this time, they are still relevant, the images still vibrant.

I found meaning in the mundane and as I re-read the words they still hold true. I have studied many Spiritual traditions - I find 'Truths' in them all - we are all seeking the same truths. The poem 'Simplicity of Life' and the painting 'Re-B'Earth' are examples of my understandings of the 'Truths' - the ones that I have encountered. They are a connection to the world around me and are influenced by Celtic Traditions and Eastern Philosophies. We are all individual, but the spark of Creation links us together. Being 'creative' in all aspects of living balances and harmonizes us within the general chaos of life. Through the poems and paintings in the book, I sought to share with the reader my journey and the inspirations that helped me explain and relate to everyday life. I try to embrace everything with pleasure - understanding the ugly and the beautiful - which helps me to accept change rather than fight it. I continue to Draw, Paint, Sculpt, Sing, Dance and Write. Exploring these urges enriches my life. In 2014 my life has moved on, my children are finding their own paths, I now have more time to spend exploring. My most recent poem is: 'Rebellious Creativity'.

SIMPLICITY OF LIFE

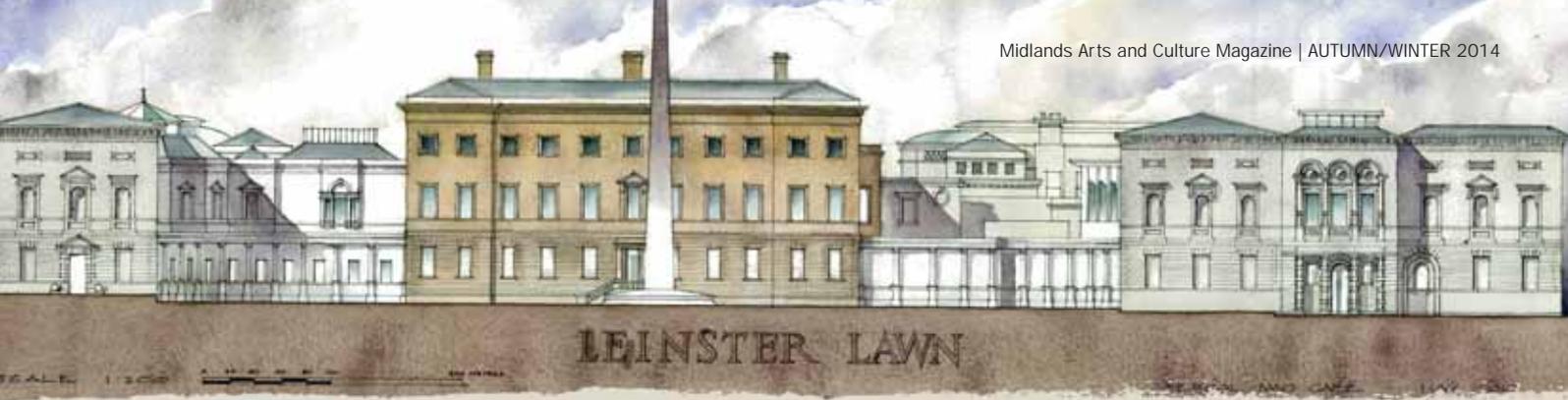
(Denise Terry O'Neill)

The soft morning awakens over the Lough.
Subtle changes in light, Gentle waves & soothing rain.
Dawn happened. No great drama.
Life is really very simple.
Limiting thoughts & rigid ideas are forms of
entrapment.
The 'stuff' of life is organized with diversity.
Be mindful & retain control of your senses.
Turn away from anything that takes away your
serenity.
Retreat to the sanctuary of the land.
Nurture the planet & she will heal you with her
Divine Love.
Explore the wisdom of the ages
These emanate from the heart & soul of Earth.
See through the trials & situations that are weighing
heavily.
Be humble enough to ask for assistance, Be grateful
for all you receive.
Open gently & lovingly to a new expanded viewpoint.
Assimilate the pain & gain the wisdom.
Have faith & allow the material & spirit
realms to balance.
The simplicity of Life!

REBELLIOUS CREATIVITY

(Denise Terry 2014)

Igniting Intelligence, motivating & moving
Clearing, cleansing & making space for:
Rebellious Creativity.
It hides within the Happiness,
Welling up with
Rhythm, words, colours & form,
Waking to walking the path,
Living Dangerously,
Opening to the Unknown,
The Adventure,
Loving Being
Healthy, Whole & Happy,
Making space for:
Rebellious Creativity.



CASTING SHADOWS.....

Architect Fergal McCabe talks about the art of sciagraphy and his exhibition of architectural drawings at Aras an Chontae Tullamore in October 2014.

Fergal MacCabe revels in being a throwback to a long gone era when architectural rendering was all about pencils, penmanship and rulers and cheerfully admits to an inability to come to terms with advances in architectural science and technology and sophisticated computer aided design packages.

MacCabe's anachronistic approach towards modern practices might be considered deliberately perverse but he remains true to his trade and art form and his illustrations of buildings and topographical drawings are much sought after

He is the winner of the Georgian Society's award for his original drawing of Dublin Castle and in the past few years he has begun to explore the concept of the architectural capriccio, which is a composition of imaginary or real architecture in a picturesque or dramatic setting. He has won the Sullivan Graphics prize for his "Dublin Capriccio".

"In a Capriccio," explains McCabe, "sometimes familiar buildings are relocated to unfamiliar settings to allow a reappraisal of their qualities. In the early Renaissance the capriccio was a device used to promote or explore the concept of the ideal or Utopian city. In the hands of Panini and Canaletto it became a common theme for the production of attractive compositions in the Classical manner. Ireland had its own practitioner in William Van der Hagen (active 1720-1745) whose *Capriccio with Pastoral Figures* is in the National Gallery."

Sciagraphy (or the art of representing cast shadows as realistically as possible in order to fully reveal the three dimensional character of the building and its detail) became the trade of every architect and together with a solid grounding in the canons of Classical architecture, it was the foundation of all training until late in the 20th Century.

Many wonderfully drawn and detailed studies became works of art in their own right. In Ireland the elevational drawing of the Blue Coat School by Thomas Ivory or the cross section of the Four

Courts by James Gandon are amongst the best.

"The finest drawings were produced by the students of the Ecole des Beaux- Arts in Paris" says McCabe. "In the late 19th Century during their studies it was obligatory to journey to Rome and Athens to study and measure the great buildings of antiquity such as the Coliseum or the Parthenon and to produce a measured drawing, usually executed in pen and Chinese ink. The winner was awarded the "Grand Prix de Rome" and these exquisite drawings, particularly those of Louis Duc, represent the highest point of the genre."

This emphasis on a grounded knowledge of the Classical tradition prevailed in Irish architectural schools until about 1980 and the production of a well rendered Doric, Ionic or Corinthian facade in

the Beaux Arts style was an essential rite of passage for every aspiring architect. Fergal MacCabe studied at the School of Architecture U.C.D. from 1957 to 1963 and continues to practice his sciagraphic skills and draughtsmanship and watercolour technique to depict buildings of the Classical style.

Now based in Dublin, the built heritage of McCabe's home county of Offaly has continued to inspire him and this exhibition in Tullamore (his first in Offaly in over 25 years) features drawings of well known Dublin architectural ensembles, elevational renderings of Offaly buildings of architectural merit and several capriccii displaying well known buildings of both locations.

An Exhibition of Architectural Drawings by Fergal MacCabe, Aras An Chontae, Tullamore - 16-31 October 2014





Síoraí:

Visualising James Fintan Lalor's Words Today by Brendon Deacy

When Muireann Ní Chonail asked me to produce an exhibition of paintings about James Fintan Lalor (JFL) I had to confess that I knew very little about him. As I conducted my initial research, I learnt that Lalor contributed immensely to the Irish political landscape but what struck me most of all was how what he said back in the early 1800s is just as vital today.

Rather than repeating previous processes that I have used, I felt this project needed an original approach so to emphasise the contemporary relevance of his statements I decided to use his words verbatim; treat them in the style of Irish political posters of his time; and juxtapose them with images of present-day Ireland. Finding current issues to depict with his words was all too easy; there is an eerie similarity between what Lalor was commenting about and what I see happening today. Austerity, mass emigration and the obscene gulf between rich and poor were the main themes that I wanted to respond to. After thorough research into Lalor's life, I examined the posters of this period at the National Library. Working with lettering is a passion of mine so I loved examining the original posters and identifying their typefaces. Irish posters of the Nineteenth Century were as uncompromisingly direct as Lalor himself so I have attempted to bring their attributes of communication and urgency into the paintings.

To add to the visceral nature that I wanted for the images I collected dust and debris from Tinakil House where Lalor was born and mixed it with oil paint which created alluring textures and significantly also forges a metaphysical connection

between the work and the man himself. A colour palette was also determined by the photographs I took on this visit.

Whenever I begin a body of work I choose a key word that I will constantly refer to throughout the project. In this case I felt the most appropriate word for both Lalor and my paintings would be

'integrity' so whenever I have made a choice – about media, subject-matter or any detail – I would be guided by my answer to the question 'does this decision have integrity?' 'Integrity' has been an important word for me since I came of age in Thatcher's Britain. The only redeeming feature of Thatcher's tyrannical reign, I believe, was that it was the catalyst for an explosion of creativity.

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Wonderful paintings, films, TV, books and songs of dissent from that period informed my development as an artist. What united the best of this work was its integrity. Although artists that I speak to feel the same antipathy for what is happening in Ireland now, as the British creative community felt in Thatcher's time, it concerns me that there isn't much evidence of it being addressed in their work. The driving force behind 'Sioraí' was always going to be raising awareness about JFL but it became clear that I could also use it as a vehicle to express my revulsion at all that is rotten in Irish society today. I feel that the disconnect that Lalor witnessed between rulers and ruled is currently no different. Since Lalor spoke out so passionately about this in his day it would be disingenuous of me not to use my methods of communication to do the same.

Although I began to receive positive feedback I also began to think that it would be a real shame if all the subtle details in the paintings' messages did not register. I know that visitors to an exhibition often give no more than cursory glances to work on display but I really want people to consider the meanings in these paintings and see the relevance of Lalor's words today. I therefore decided to ask commentators who I admire if they would reflect on a particular painting from the series and write an article to accompany it. The enthusiasm that this idea received really took me aback so I am designing a one-off newspaper, that will contain all of the images from the exhibition with extraordinary commentaries by Robert Ballagh, Martin Doyle, Tim Durham, Teddy Fennelly, Sean Fleming, Mick Heaney, Seamus Hosey, Ken Loach, Jim O'Brien, Clare Short and Sister Stanislaus-Kennedy. This publication will be given away free of charge at my exhibition opening. Because it will be printed in a limited edition and with its sheer

quality of writing, it will become a much sought-after artefact.

My son Louis, a very talented film-maker, has documented the whole artistic journey from research to execution. This short film, which also includes candid footage of Robert Ballagh, Kevin Lalor-Fitzpatrick and others involved in the project will premier at 3pm, Saturday 18 October, to close the JFL Autumn School 2014 and conclude Sioraí with the integrity that Lalor inspires.

'Sioraí: Visualising James Fintan Lalor's Words Today' will open at 7pm, Friday 3rd October, at the Dunamais Arts Centre. All welcome.

A limited number of copies of the publication which accompanies the exhibition, with contributions from eleven leading commentators, will be given away free of charge at the opening.

The short film which documents the making of the exhibition will premier at the James Fintan Lalor Autumn School at 3pm, Saturday 18th October, the Dunamais Arts Centre.

Brendon Deacy is a Laois artist who has published two critically acclaimed artist's books, 'The State We're Out' and 'A Life in Relief'. Many notable public collections hold his work. 'Sioraí' will be his seventeenth solo show. He was recently commissioned to make images in response to a series of short stories by prominent writers on the theme of 'This Means War' that were published weekly in The Irish Times. He teaches at NCAD and has been a visiting tutor to the Universities of Anadolu (Turkey), Birmingham, Helsinki, San Diego and the Royal College of Art.



THE IRON MAN

Offline Film Festival is preparing for a 5 day feast of film this October in Birr, with a growing reputation with Irish and International filmmakers, but it is the premiere of a local documentary film which will inspire both filmmakers and audiences alike.

The Iron Man is a documentary following Irish artist and poet Michael Thatcher's incredible battle with terminal cancer made by Offaly filmmakers Nicky Larkin and Niall Cahir. Frustrated with the "cancer industry" and their attempts to keep people alive just long enough to bleed them dry, Michael began researching alternative treatments in an awe inspiring journey which took him thousands of miles across the globe with an unbeatable positivity that will touch everyone who spends an hour in his company.

After undergoing the genetic blood testing for the BRCA gene (cancer gene), it emerged that all of Michael's family, bar one, had the gene. Carriers of this rare gene have an 80% chance of developing cancer, being highly hereditary it is devastating to entire families.

Michael's children have themselves battled cancer and he was initially diagnosed with prostate cancer over a decade ago, but in recent years this had metastasised and spread to his bones, including his spine. Refusing to accept conventional medicine's bleak prognosis – or harsh chemotherapy treatments – he set about finding an alternative course of action to save not only his life, but the lives of his family.

He discovered the work of Rick Simpson, an advocate of cannabinoid treatments for a whole range of diseases, and has had extensive success curing not only himself, but a wide range of sufferers of everything from brain tumours to arthritis.

Inspired by this, Michael began extensively researching the work of pioneering Israeli organic chemist Prof

Raphael Mechoulam. Now in his mid-eighties, the professor continues to develop cannabinoid treatments for a range of diseases and Michael travelled to Jerusalem to meet him and discuss his treatments.

And so after almost three years of extensive research, *The Iron Man* took matters into his own hands. He built a grow-house in a small garden shed, and planted his own crop of cannabis plants to create the cannabinoid oil he required. After a few months of ingesting the oil daily, the results were startling. To the bewilderment of his doctors, Michael gained four stone in weight and when summer came he was out digging the soil in his garden planting roses, when doctors had predicted he'd be six foot under the soil by then.



The Great Doodle Project:

The Great Doodle Project: Artist Lucy Tormey returns to her alma mater and writes of how her engagement with the students there brings a fresh perspective to her own practice.

I had a wonderful opportunity in May and June this year to work with the 5th class pupils from Presentation Senior School in Mullingar. We got funding from The Westmeath Arts Office and the school provided the funds for the materials we needed. We titled our project "The Great Doodle Project". The aim of the project was to facilitate pupils in exploring their own unique visual language through mark making and symbols. We worked over the course of five Thursdays. The first three sessions were geared around individual exercises through a series of media; felt tipped pens, acrylic paint and collage, leading to a group piece where every participant contributed to a large work for the school. As the project evolved we discussed what the end product might be. The pupils responded at the end of each session on a notice board giving feedback about the sessions and ideas for the group piece. In the end we made two large canvases with a magical jungle theme that now hang in the school's assembly hall.

Magical, is a good description for the project over all. For me as an artist it was an extraordinary experience. Presentation Convent, as I knew it, was the school where I had my primary education in the mid to late 1970's. Although I was fortunate to have great teachers, it was a pretty austere experience. My memories smell of flasks of tea (a sip of which I have

never taken in my life as a result) and bits of discarded white bread crusts on the grey concrete floor of the colonnade. There were echoes of the school bell being rung by a terrifying nun, or her favoured pupil of the day, to mark the end of play or to take an ordered line in the playground before being led back to class. As children we learned through fear, fear of being made an example of, or god help us, fear of some of the nuns and teachers who meted out punishment with the whack of a ruler across the hand or a thump in the back. Of course it wasn't all that bad, there were plenty of fun times too, but there is no denying the residual feelings.

It had been 35 years since I set foot in a building that held such a significant part of my forming and my history. The floor was the same, green and beige marble inlaid with brass. This time I noticed the craftsmanship. On a windowsill outside the staff room there was an old school bell. Sitting there as an ornament, I wondered could it be the actual bell that summoned us hither and thither? It was broken, a crack down the side of the old brown metal. Leonard Cohen, I thought, "there is a crack in everything, that's how the light gets in". Already I could feel the light in the place. There was a jaunty atmosphere, a happy energy, everyone welcoming and the building buzzing with activity.

Some weeks later, when the project started proper and the first group of 28 eleven (or so) year olds arrived into the artroom, we introduced ourselves, picked our favourite animals and our favourite places and got The Great Doodle Project up and running. Within 10 minutes all 28 worked away and, impromptu and in unison, sang a bunch of songs to accompany their drawing. It was brilliant and set the tone for the weeks to follow. It was just the same with the afternoon group. I think we all had a ball. I certainly did. The work the girls produced was wonderful. It was colourful, joyful and respectful as we moved from individual work to teamwork. My hope for the project is to have given the girls access to a good experience of the visual arts and to reinforce the value of nurturing creative expression, for now and for the future. For me, there was a certain amount of healing in the process, to realise that a building can appear the same and yet be utterly changed for the better. Thanks to the school principal Michael Tunney, to the teachers Catherine Deniffe and Claire Coleman, to Ruth, Dympna, Abbi and John, and all of the 5th class pupils who gave me the chance to feel like a twelve year old again. It was magical!

The Great Doodle project was supported through a grant from Westmeath Arts office.

Postcards from the Centre

An exhibition of 300 postcards created by users of health care settings in Offaly will form a large exhibit in Aras an Chontae, Tullamore this November.

Facilitated by Anam Beo, creative and enthusiastic members of the Irish Wheelchair Association, Riada House, Birr Nursing Unit, Clara Day Care, Carthage House, Mucklagh, the Attic Therapy Centre and Ofalia House have created these small artworks using collage and mixed media on a standard postcard.

The artists who created this project will also hold an open day at Aras an Chontae by providing art materials and postcards for members of the public who wish to create their own postcard art work to add to the exhibition.

Instead of an opening event, there will be a closing reception to celebrate the work made in the health care settings and added to by the public.

Also forming part of the exhibit is information and an animated DVD about Bipolar Disorder created by Rowena Keavney with the Attic Centre. This DVD was aided by the Community Foundation for Ireland and the Attic Centre and aims to provide a user friendly way to discuss and learn about Bipolar.



Maria O'Brien

Maria O'Brien was the recipient of a residency in Laois Arthouse for the month of August.

The residency, which comprises of the use of the state of the art studio facilities at Laois Arthouse, was first prize in the 2013 Open Submission Group Show at the Dunamais Arts Centre. Noel Kelly, CEO of Visual Artists Ireland, was invited to select the work for the show and the winner.

As well as being practicing artist, Maria is an art teacher in the Midlands Prison, Portlaoise. She has an honours Masters in Fine Art NCAD, a Hdip from Limerick School of Art and Design and a first class honours degree in Fine Art from NCAD. She has exhibited widely in group exhibitions such as the Boyle arts festival, Eigse Carlow and 'Still-life and Interiors' curated by Bernadette Madden, in Gormley's Fine, South Great Fredrick St. Dublin, 2013. She has had a number of solo exhibitions, including a show in the Dunamais Arts Centre in

2010 and the solo exhibition award from North Tipperary County council 2011.

"The starting point of my work is the figure in landscape and I work mainly in oil paint. I paint from photographs, both my own and from photos posted on social media sites. The photos that interest me the most are of people at leisure or on their holidays; I use these photographs as a starting point and through painting from them, new narratives emerge. I recognise a collective romanticism or yearning for the experience of the sublime or adventure and a love of kitsch."

"I find that doing a residency away from the usual routine and space that I work in very beneficial. It gives me a chance to see the work in a new light, to come up with fresh ideas and to get lots of painting done," explains Maria.



Ten years ago Roesy, the acclaimed musician from Birr, was a rising name on the Irish music scene and quickly became one to watch. He had already been signed by Warner Chapell, nominated in the 2004 Meteor Music Awards and 2005 Hot Press Awards and was a regular on Today FM, appearing on Other Voices on RTÉ and sharing the stage with the likes of Bert Jansch, Ron Sexsmith, Joan Armatrading, Paul Brady, Billy Bragg, John Martyn, and Shane MacGowan.

His name and music don't frequent Irish billing and radio these days, unfortunately out-of-sight out-of-mind is common for Irish musicians, but in Australia (his home since 2011) he tours regularly, has played to thousands alongside Joan As Policewoman and is about to release his 7th album, *Wolf Counsel*.

Speaking to the *Midlands Arts and Culture Magazine* from Australia, Roesy has described how being an Irish musician abroad is an interesting one. "Sometimes I'd show up to gigs and they would have me billed as a traditional Irish musician just because I'm Irish. People coming to the show with an expectation of what an Irish musician is and disappointed that I'm not singing rebel songs has happened me more than once."

But with a growing fan base and exposure and some excellent reviews, disappointment is certainly not something his audiences feel coming away from a gig in Australia. A review in the *Irish Echo*, described a gig as "nothing short of a privilege. The fans were mesmerised for the entire gig. There is nothing forced or strained and he brings his rich vocals to a strong catalogue of work. His voice can race from being a wrinkled folk singer one moment to a hip-hop beat boxer within a flash. It's polished and faultless, and his thoughtful lyrics give it an extra edge." *The Australian Stage* described Roesy as Roesy enthralled the audience with his heartfelt songs sung with clarity and poignancy, delivered with a lyrical

voice that lingers in your memory long after he has left the stage.

Roesy is funding the new album *Wolf Counsel* through a crowd funding campaign, and has raised to date over \$10,000, quite an achievement but not surprising. "As you can imagine I am filled with gratitude and excitement! The studio is booked for the recording, mixing and mastering and I will have the album in my hand on November 1st for my first ever Australian release."

He recently got to test drive songs from the new album while supporting Joan As Policewoman on their Australian tour and said, "it was a wonderful experience and it was great to be out on big stages every night with the new material, there's nothing like a thousand people listening to your new material to know if it's any good or not."

Home for Roesy is Australia now, a small town outside Melbourne, and he readily admits to missing Ireland. "I love Australia. They have a great sense of humour but home is home. You get on with it and integrate as much as possible. It's a very healthy music scene here; they really appreciate and love their music. As much as I miss home, being one tiny part of the cultural diverse melting pot that is Melbourne, from a creative point, has given me an anonymity and independence free of the terms of engagement that go with the familiar, to dig very deep and wide. That has been the bedrock of the next album *Wolf Counsel*."

Irish fans of Roesy, however won't have to wait too long as he plans an Irish tour of the new album in Ireland in May/ June 2015 in what will be no doubt, a much anticipated return home and a much sought after ticket.

www.roesy.net • Facebook **Roesy Music**

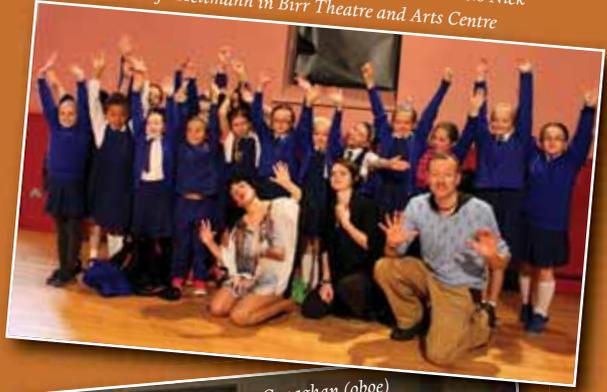


A Whole Lot of ROESY

**Birr native releases new album
Wolf Counsel in Australia**

CultureNight2014

Students from Mercy Convent PS in Birr with dance artists Nick Bryson and Katja Heitmann in Birr Theatre and Arts Centre



Longford Artist Eimear Walshe



Longford Artist



Ann Conaghan (piano), Fergus Conaghan (oboe) and Sarah Darlington (soprano) in an intimate setting at Ballybrittan Castle



Virtuoso Chamber Choir performed at Birr Castle Science Gallery



Making a picture book at a Dolores Keaveney workshop at Birr Library



David Bacon, Una Larkin and Rosalind Fanning at a discussion on the art of the short story at Tin Jug Studio



Laois Arts Officer Muireann Ni Chonail introduces readings and Music with Anne Egan poet and musicians Eddie Sheehan & Niamh Furlong at the Old Bank House Mountmellick

Bill Larkin, Clodagh Fay, Emma Nee Haslam, Gary Hoctor, Marcella Corcoran Kennedy, Miriam Smyth and David Weymes at the programme launch of the OFFline Film Festival.



Young members from Rhode Comhaltas in Ballybryan NS



Music Generation Choir from Dromakeenan NS outside Birr Garda Station



Joachim Hein from the Miles O'Boag Jazz Ensemble



Laois Arthouse Artist-in-residence L Walsh conducted a Shadow Puppet Wo

Longford



Weapons of Mass Destruction



Ed Walshe, Ceramicist and Grandson

Longford Artist Orla Kelleher



Caroline Keane Arthouse Resident Artist showing how it's done

Midlands Concert Orchestra, Mountmellick



Katie and Della Scully, Caoimhe and Rian Graham, Elisa Scully, Caoilfhionn and James Graham at the Rock of Dunamase for the Concert by Adela and the Meanits during Culture Night.



Pictured at the Dunamase Arts Centre 15th. Birthday Celebration/ 'Rian' Unplugged Concert, were: Michelle de Forge, Clr. MarySweeney, Liam O'Maonlai, Maureen Clooney and Louis Brennan.



Mullingar's Louise Cawley, Siobhan Hicks, Liam Hicks



Moate's Aaron Claffey

Irish Midlands Youth Orchestra performing at Westmeath Culture Night

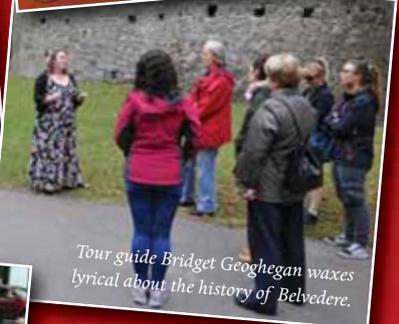


Moate's Susan, Poppy, Heather Kennedy & Gavin Ross

Moate Library Assistant Lorna Farrell with enthusiastic participants in the Roald Dahl art competition



Mullingar's Helen Cooke, Tanya Ross and Dave O'Shea at Tanya's cake sculpting expo in the Chimera Gallery



Tour guide Bridget Geoghegan waxes lyrical about the history of Belvedere.

Westmeath's Culture Night - Dance Factory



Westmeath's Culture Night Harpists



Mullingar Town Band



Sweet Tunes in Mullingar Arts Centre



Historian Ruth Illingworth about to start her Literary Walk

Westmeath

Longford writer pens children's story

Tarmonbarry-based author Eileen Moynihan launched her latest book, 'Rory Gumboots' during the summer.

The book tells the story of Rory Gumboots, a hedgehog who lives with his friends in Noddinghead Nook. They live in peace and serenity in the woods until one day the quiet of their home is shattered by monster machines, and none of the animals know what to do.

"The animals have a meeting, and it's there that the owl reveals the machines are made by men," Eileen explains. "They seek advice from Professor Puffanwheeze, who's a naturalist, and who is worried when he hears of the problem."

Eileen hints that the key to the animals' success could lie in a rare flower called a lady slipper, which the professor discovers growing in Noddinghead Nook,

while two of the characters, Horace Hare and Fernando Fox, try their best to upset things.

First published as an e-book, 'Rory Gumboots' was originally released without illustrations, but now it is available in paperback, complete with beautiful illustrations from Epubublishingexperts, and Eileen also ran a competition, where local children were invited to submit their own illustrations, with the winners in the two categories – 4-5 years old, and 6-8 years-old announced at the book's launch, which took place at the Ardagh Heritage and Creativity Centre on June 7.

An active member of Longford Writers' Group, Eileen also recently completed a writing course monitored by writer Alan McMonagle, who spoke at

the launch of 'Rory Gumboots' in Ardagh. "I always liked animal stories when I was younger, such as the ones by Beatrix Potter, Enid Blyton, and Alison Uttley," Eileen says, before adding: "I'd like to inspire children to read books."

Eileen also announced that she is currently finishing work on another book, intriguingly titled 'The Reckolahesperus', which is due to be released this autumn.

"It's about a child who is told he looks like the wreck of the Hesperous," she continues. "He doesn't know what that means, and he comes to the conclusion that it's a creature that only comes out at night when he's asleep."



MUSIC GENERATION LAOIS AT ELECTRIC PICNIC 2014

A selection of Young musicians who participate in Music Generation Laois programmes, received a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to perform at this year's Electric Picnic in Stradbally, Co Laois. Music Generation Laois, along with Music Generation Limerick City and the national Music Generation office, hosted a range of performances and workshops at Electric Picnic 2014. All Music Generation Laois activity took place in the Mindfield Arena, centered around the Music Generation stage, and the custom-designed, Graffiti art double decker bus from Music Generation Limerick City.

Performances throughout the weekend included a giant choir, 'One Voice', led by Music Generation Laois and featuring 70 singers from Laois, Donegal,

Carlow and Offaly-Westmeath. The Music Generation Laois Stampede Drumming Group and a group of rappers from Music Generation Limerick City also performed, to an enthralled audience. The Music Generation Laois Traditional Music Orchestra performed on both the Music Generation Stage, and the Puball na Gaelige stage, and were broadcasted live on Radio na Life from the Festival

Rosa Flannery, Co-ordinator of Music Generation Laois commented, 'We were thrilled to bring young musicians from Laois to the Electric Picnic 2014, to perform at such a well-known high profile Festival is a wonderful, and indeed unforgettable opportunity for these musicians. It is equally wonderful for Festival Goers to get the opportunity

to hear just how talented young musicians in Laois and across Ireland are. In addition to performances, our range of workshops gave festival-goers an opportunity to get a hands-on insight into what the Music Generation initiative is all about.'

Music Generation Laois is a music education service for children and young people in county Laois. It is part of Music Generation – Ireland's National Music Education Programme, initiated by Music Network, co-funded by U2, The Ireland Funds, the Department of Education and Skills and Local Music Education Partnerships. Locally, Music Generation Laois is managed by Laois Music Education Partnership and funded by Laois County Council, Laois Offaly ETB and Laois Partnership Company.

A GIANT BLUE EXCLUSIVE

Marina Carr's award winning play for children *The Giant Blue Hand* will be performed for the first time in Ireland by a local drama group for Hullabaloo Children's Arts Festival in Offaly writes Maura Cunningham.

Marina Carr, the renowned Offaly playwright, is delighted that Tullamore Amateur Drama Society is the first to take the production on since its premiere in the Ark in 2009, especially for Hullabaloo! Offaly's Children Arts Festival. "I've only seen one production of *The Giant Blue Hand* which was *The Ark* one...so I'd really love to see this production, see what they do with it".

Offaly native Marina is now lauded as 'one of Ireland's most important playwrights since Beckett' in a review by Nancy Finn in *World Literature Today*. Marina is a strong advocate of children's arts festivals and all things Hullabaloo! "I don't think we've enough [artistic] stuff for children. And they're the most vulnerable members of society because of that. Men in suits making decisions - don't tend to think of the 3 or 5 year old - unfortunately it's the way the world is. But I think Hullabaloo! is an absolutely wonderful idea...and children watching live theatre are an astonishing thing to witness. I remember, in *The Ark* show, just watching the kids in the audience and their absolute concentration and argument with what was going on. You could see it on their faces. And I think more of that - storytelling, music, painting - all of the arts, just makes for really well rounded individuals as they grow up. And they in turn will give

that back and be able to contribute - it's a long term thing."

It certainly became a long-term thing for Marina. Although being raised around Pallas Lake and its environs might not seem like the cultural capital of Ireland, Carr grew up in a household filled with literature. Both of her parents were writers: her father was a novelist and a playwright and her mother was a poet and a teacher. Marina says "we used to go to all the amateur theatricals...and we used to put on our own plays". She laughs at the memory, "I mean the absolute anarchy of children putting on plays, writing them, and staging them... we had the most horrific plotlines with people in vats of boiling oil. We had a crucifix and used to crucify people - you name it! But then, at the end, everybody lived happily ever after". Apparently she doesn't have to rein in the dark side of her imagination too much in writing for children? "No, you do, obviously you do because you're writing for children, so you have to have a happy ending. But within that there's a great journey to go on...you can still have monsters and demons and witches roaming the territory. Children are well able for that. They're freer in their imaginations than we are'.



Marina Carr

In fact, the idea for 'TGBH' actually came from a child's imagination: "The Ark asked me to write a play for children... And one of my sons, who was 5 or 6, said 'Why don't you write about a big blue hand coming out of the water'. And I thought that sounds like as good a place as any to start, so that was it. Now obviously, when you break that down practically, how on earth is a giant blue hand going to snatch up a mother and baby? So the director has to come up with an imaginative representation of how that would be done".

To see how local directors Fionnuala Corrigan & Frank O'Brien achieve this in their production of 'The Giant Blue Hand' - and to check out all other artistic events that are occurring over the October Midterm Break weekend.

See: www.offaly.ie/arts. The 8th Hullabaloo! Children's Arts Festival is a jam-packed programme of theatre, dance, art, storytelling and music - all for the under 12's.



Eimear Walshe



Orla Kelleher

This autumn will see a special Emerging Artists Exhibition being hosted in the Atrium Gallery at the Backstage Theatre in Longford town. Organised by Longford County Arts Office, the exhibition, which opened on September 17th, will feature three up-and-coming artists from County Longford: Eimear Walshe, Orla Kelleher, and Niamh Masterson.

"I focus on making sculptures, videos, and performances," says Eimear Walshe, who recently graduated from the National College of Art and Design in Dublin. "The work I'll be showing in the Atrium Gallery will be a representation of my practice so far; all of the work has been produced during the summer of 2014 with the support of the local arts office."

Despite only recently achieving her academic qualification, Eimear has already displayed work at galleries in Dublin and The Netherlands, while she has also curated exhibitions and organised residences such as 'Setup, a Device' in Dublin and 'The 46th Lock' in Longford.

Orla Kelleher, meanwhile, has a BA in Fine Art Printing and a H Dip in Art and Design Education from the Limerick School of Art and Design, as well as an MA in Interactive Media from the University of Limerick.

"Although video and photography have been part of my work at various times, I work predominantly through the medium of paint," she explains, before going on to say that the past year has seen her focusing on abstract mixed media paintings of the Irish landscape, which she admits is a "great departure" for her.

"This new interest in the landscape was initially sparked by an autumn trip to Poland in 2012, followed a few months later by a trip to Connemara with my mam and 96-year-old gran," Orla continues. "What struck me the most was the contrast in colours and their rapid change, particularly the high intensity of light and colour after a shower of rain. I began experimenting with this subject last year, while concurrently working from my life drawing sketches to make paintings."

Having graduated with a First class (Honours) Degree in painting from Limerick School of Art and Design in 2010, Niamh Masterson cites the landscapes of Aghnaclyffe and Gowna in north Longford as her inspiration.

"My work is typically landscape painting with a youthful embrace of colour and technology," she reveals. "I use generative tools like scanners, printers and photocopier machines as an example of how technology is making information easier to attain today. In response, I engage and invite my audience to question my paintings, not just to passively observe. The foundation for my colour palette are the tri colours - magenta, cyan, and yellow - which are used by digital printing methods."

Up and coming talents combine for Emerging Artists Exhibition



James McAvoy, Anne Hathaway and Laurence Fox in a scene from *Becoming Jane* which was filmed in Charleville Castle, Tullamore. Image courtesy of Miramax.

The Midlands

The Midlands – Ireland’s Hidden Cultural Hot-spot Manchán Magan

A comedian interviewed recently about his Australian tour described the most cultureless and racist town he visited, as “even worse than Mullingar.” Liam Fay referred to Offaly in the Sunday Times as “one of the country’s most disparaged regions. Its reputation as a dreary and boorish outback, a bog where BIFFO roam and seldom is heard an encouraging word, has proven remarkably durable.” Even Michael Viney, who cherishes every slimy newt and horsefly wrote of the Midlands as “a wearily protracted obstacle between Dublin and the west... a slow ticking off of dull little towns on a lot of flattish land drained by sluggish rivers.”

We Midlanders do have feelings, you know? And, FYI, while you’ve been busy disparaging us we have undergone a cultural renaissance.

Let me introduce you to the Good Hatchery in Offaly, possibly the most vibrant and coveted artists residency in Ireland; or Hilltown New Music Festival in Westmeath, the most innovative festival of experimental music in Ireland; or Athlone’s Poetry in the Park initiative which won Britain’s Epic Award for Cultural Innovation; or Laois’s dynamic Arthouse studio; or Fabulous Beast Dance Theatre whose work, created in Longford, tours the most illustrious international venues.

If we really are a cultural Siberia, an energetic sink-hole how come so many artists, writers and creative types are moving here? Why do the progenitors of artistic elitism swarm down upon us for Electric Picnic in Laois and Body & Soul in Westmeath?

HATCHING GOLDEN EGGS

The Good Hatchery epitomises the newly flourishing midlands. This 19th century hayloft converted into residential studios and a sauna using recycled and salvaged material has the feel of an experimental art initiative one might find in Berlin, except that it is set amidst the “flat black bogs, lakes and forests of beautifully, bleak North Offaly.”

It developed from a group of artists who were concerned that only 2% of art college graduates manage to continue their arts practise without compromising themselves to earn an income. Since money stretches further in the Midlands where large

buildings can be had free of rent and living costs are less, they moved here. “It’s a myth that an emerging artist needs to stay in a city to become established,” says Ruth Lyons, one of the founders. “Broadband now connects us to the world.”

The Good Hatchery aims, “to spread provocative art tactics and practice beyond major cities and to give young contemporary artists the space and time to establish themselves.” Over the last 7 years scores of artists have used it as a springboard. Applications for residencies are as sought after as for the most elite state-sponsored equivalents.

Their success inspired Westmeath to develop the Abbey Road Artists’ Studios in what was previously the Athlone workhouse and later a fire station. It is now 4 artist studios and a performance/exhibition space with links to the Luan, the most spectacularly situated gallery in Ireland, jutting out over the Shannon.

Stradbally in Co. Laois have now also converted their fine Georgian courthouse into Arthouse, a complex of artists’ studios with living accommodation, an exhibition gallery, a community library, a kiln room and fully-equipped digital studio. In its first few years this has become a pulsating hive of artistic activity, spanning everything from dance, spoken word, explorations of matters such as graffiti art and the future of arts in Laois, and the recent high profile Nick Millar *Sitting* residency, in which the acclaimed portrait artist painted five portraits a day of local people over 10 days.

But these are just the official arts spaces, pull back the timber doors on any fine old dilapidated cut-stone building in the midlands and you are liable to find artists beaver away. The stables and granaries of stately homes prove particularly popular.

There are so many artists here now that many have created their own networks, bypassing the stuffy Dublin-centric establishment. Longford has created a platform at visuallongford.ie to highlight the many professional artists who have moved here, lured by an abundance of large, atmospheric buildings, and great motorway and train access.

CHOREOGRAPHY IN THE BOG

Longford has also become an international centre for contemporary dance spearheaded by the presence of Shawbrook Dance School in Legan for 30 years. This former dairy farm has established itself as the centre for genuinely innovative contemporary dance and ballet in Ireland, attracting renowned choreographers to train students who travel from afar.

In 2004 Ireland’s most acclaimed director/choreographer Michael Keegan-Dolan relocated his Fabulous Beast Dance Theatre company from London to Longford and has been developing shows on a farm and now Longford’s military barracks that win major awards in London and New York and are invited to the most illustrious arts festivals around the world.

THE HOLLYWOOD OF IRELAND

In terms of film, nowhere is more proactive than Offaly. 6 years ago they realised their potential as an

affordable film location and set about promoting their variety of locations: the Slieve Bloom Mountains, the Grand Canal, the Shannon, 22 monastic sites, almost 90 castles, time-warp villages and endless bogland. They strive to be the county that says 'Yes' to film companies - finding ways of delivering on their frequently outlandish requests.

"There was a real can-do feeling amongst people here," Brendan Gleeson recalls, about working on his son Domhnall's movie *Noreen*. "Everything that we needed was here. Not being at the centre of Los Angeles or a massive cosmopolitan urban centre has its own strength... I would have no problem at all coming back and shooting again, or rather, I would look forward to it."

FilmOffaly's bursary has had an uncanny ability to fund productions that go on to win major awards, and local businesses throughout the county have united to create the FilmOffaly Vendor Card which entitles production companies to a discount of up to 25% on accommodation and services. Over the next year you'll see the midlands cropping up in numerous Irish movies: *The Participants*, *Our Unfenced Country* and *A Nightingale Falling* – the latter getting a nationwide release.

BARELY DISTINGUISHABLE MUSIC

In terms of contemporary music nowhere has been more pioneering than the Hilltown Studio Theatre in a Medieval castle keep near Castlepollard, Co Westmeath. The network of 15th to 19th century stables, harness rooms and medieval halls have been adapted into workshop rooms, performances spaces and small stages for opera, dance and theatre development.

"Hilltown represents a model of how the arts can develop in Ireland," says Fionnuala Cawhill, its founder, "a coming together through which there is no ease of slipping into old routines. The venues are not conventional, the living is more or less communal and there is nowhere to run off to. It provides this immersive space, cocooned in an inspirational

Midlands setting, freeing artists to work with a focus that is not usually possible."

ENTRANCING THE YOUNG THROUGH MUSIC

Meanwhile, Laois, Offaly and Westmeath are firmly focused on fostering the next generation of musicians with their phenomenally wide-ranging music education programme developed through Music Generation, the National Music Education Programme funded by U2 and The Ireland Funds. As The Edge says, "even if you choose not to make it your job, learning music is proven to have a hugely positive effect on society in general."

Laois Arts Office pioneered a music education programme in 2001 with the establishment of the Laois School of Music, which continues to thrive. With the addition of Music Generation Laois in 2012, children in Laois have revelled in the dizzying diversity of music training available to them: everything from Glee clubs, choirs, rock and pop schools, brass band training, trad sessions, harp classes, jazz camps, drumming circles and workshops with a wide array of stellar teachers, from renowned Columbian harpists to living legends such as accordionist Brendan Begley and American choral conductor, Dr. Doreen Rao, Director of the US Institute for Choral Teacher Education.

Recently Music Generation Offaly/Westmeath announced funding for the purchase of 550 instruments for its new Play an Instrument Outreach programme which will operate from a wide variety of contexts including primary and secondary schools, afterschool programmes, disability groups, arts venues and community facilities. Be prepared to see the results of this support and training emerge over the next decade.

Music Generation is a perfect example of the form of publicly supported, socially inclusive, community focused, multi-genre arts development that is slowly transforming the Midlands. Remember what the Irish Times said of us: "A wearily protracted obstacle

between Dublin and the west." How wrong could they be... Just wait until these Midland children come of age and begin to express the fruits of all their myriad master-classes with harpists, violinists, uilleann pipers and jazz singer. If the Dublin elite can't see this is a cultural renaissance then those blinkers of urban arrogance are even darker than I feared.

BOG POETRY

The one element the Midlands have always been feted for is our writers and they continue to thrive in random lonely garrets. This year the big excitement was the Epic Award for *Poetry in the Park*, an Athlone collective that lures large followings from aged 8 to 86 out to the surrounding rivers, canals and boglands for dawn and dusk poetry readings. Their 4.30am event to celebrate the bog poems of Seamus Heaney and spell out bog poems using turf sods, was the most potent Heaney memorial I've experienced.

GET IT?

The Midlands are a primed petri dish, ready and waiting for creativity and experimentation. Ignore us and disparage us if you must, but the true pioneers of the next generation of Irish arts have already cottoned on that we are affordable and easily accessible. They are busy at work here re-imagining our creative futures.

In time, cultural tours will add our spongy brown boglands to Synge's Inis Meáin, Joyce's Dublin and Yeats' Sligo. It is from such bogs that all life emerged and now new creativity is once again fomenting.

For more on the resurgence: *The Midlands Arts and Culture Magazine*: tinyurl.com/n3mz4y3

Manchán Magan is writer, television-maker and a board member of Fabulous Beast Dance Theatre, living in Collinstown, Co Westmeath.

A version of this article appeared in *The Irish Times*, 20th Aug 2014, as *A Cultural Wasteland? You're wrong about the Midlands*.



The Art House, Stradbally.

In Acting Shakespeare

by Louise Donlon

Since leaving the Dunamaisie Arts Centre in April 2012, I have been busy in Limerick, working at the helm of the Lime Tree Theatre in Mary Immaculate College.

The work is very similar to the job I did in Portlaoise but there's one difference that will bring me back to my old stomping ground very soon.

As part of the programming for the Lime Tree, I have been on the look-out for good quality shows for venues like ours. A good friend and colleague from the arts sector, Tim Smith, moved to the US last year and he was put on notice to watch out for interesting and entertaining work that might transfer to Irish venues and audiences well. Tim had just finished 7 years working as General Manager of Druid so he knows good theatre when he sees it. He went to see *In Acting Shakespeare* by James da Vita and several months later, we are taking it on tour of Ireland in a joint venture that we hope will be just the beginning of a very fruitful collaboration.

In Acting Shakespeare is a very personal story, told

with great humour and style by James da Vita. Tim went to see it in New York and was bowled over. He approached James to see if he'd be interested in a tour of Ireland and managed to procure for me a video of the show. Now, it is worth saying here that video of live theatre rarely captures the essence of actually being present for the performance. But James' performance – and the story – was so captivating, I watched it from start to finish on my computer in my office the day it arrived in the post. I just can't wait to see the live show!

James da Vita is an actor by accident. And that accident has a lot to do with seeing the great British actor Ian McKellen on stage on Broadway in 1983 performing *Acting Shakespeare*. Initially intended to be a tribute to Ian McKellen and his work, James re-worked it many times, incorporating his own life story but, most importantly, bringing the words of

Shakespeare alive in a way many of us never experience. Sadly, Shakespeare's plays are brought to us via the school system. If we get an opportunity to see and hear his work outside that context we can only then discover what a genius he was and, more importantly, how what he has to say in his work, continues to have meaning and resonance five centuries later.

Myself and Tim have spent the past number of months preparing for what will be a 12 venue tour of Ireland, bringing this great piece to venues around the country that we know will love it. I am particularly looking forward to returning to the Dunamaisie and look forward to seeing many old friends at the show.

In Acting Shakespeare is at the Dunamaisie Arts Centre on Tuesday, October 21st. Booking: / (057) 866 3355



TAKING IT BY DEGREES

One of the better stories of recent times in Ireland is the reality that a person can return to education at any age, stage or time in their life. These four women from Offaly are a great advert for returning to higher education and have just held their first joint exhibition in Áras an Chontae, Tullamore.

Mary Dunne (Killeigh), Kay Ryan (Portarlinton) Rosemary Langtry (Ballinahown) and Róisín Uí Oistín (Tullamore) are now recent graduates of GMIT having made the commitment to study fine art. "We started at Moate Business College over 6 years ago, on a FETAC Level 5 course, studying drawing, painting, sculpture and communications", explains Róisín, "and we knew we needed to delve deeper. We were already passionate about being creative, but needed to find our own voices in our work as it were."

Together they decided to continue studying and take on the 6 year part-time BA in Art & Design at Galway Mayo Institute of Technology. It was a huge commitment, especially with home and life responsibilities to juggle, but the four friends

encouraged and supported each other throughout the process.

Taking inspiration from completing their degree, they titled their joint exhibition "by degrees". "We decided that having come this far as a team, a group exhibition was fitting. The work

that we have made recently, particularly towards our degree show, is work that many have not seen before, so we are revealing what we have been doing for the past 6 years, and that's a little bit scary!"



GOING BACK IN TIME...

Woodcarver Richie Clarke talks to Midlands Arts & Culture magazine about the history of this ancient art form and how it straddles the disciplines of art, craft and design.

Wood has been all around us from the beginning. It was probably the single most important natural resource on the planet for ancient man, providing him with the means of shelter, fuel and the material to fashion tools and hunting weapons. At some point in time from this period, art in wood was born. Wood remains today one of the few naturally existing materials that we can still appreciate for its beauty and usefulness. There is not a woodworker alive - be they a joiner, wood turner, French polisher or woodcarver who doesn't value the feel, aroma and beauty of wood.

The oldest known surviving wood carving is the "Sheikh-el-Beled", dated as 4,600 years old. It is a carving of a nobleman and its great presence and workmanship speak of a well-established craft at this time in history. The carving is in surprisingly good condition as it was found in a dry, airtight Egyptian tomb.

To carve wood is an ancient and often difficult task, requiring the artist to gradually remove layers of the material, slowly revealing the form within. Somewhere in woodcarving's long history, the art form appears to have become lost until the German woodcarver Tilman Riemenschneider (1460-1531) came to prominence. His work can be seen in churches and cathedrals across Germany but his most impressive piece "The Elevation of the Magdalen" resides in Bayerisches Nationalmuseum in Munich. Without question, Riemenschneider's skill and ingenuity combined with use of Lime wood as his main material, raised woodcarving to new heights as an art form. A light, densely-fibred wood, Lime was easier to carve than the standard European Oak that was tough, heavy and hard on tool edges. Lime allowed Riemenschneider to be more fluid with his designs and as a result his work is still breath-taking to this day.

Another notable carver is Dutch-British sculptor Grinling Gibbons (1648-1721). Grinling's flamboyant cascades of life-like blossoms, fruits, foliage, birds and fish dominated English interiors in the late 17th century. His work adorned the walls of many important British buildings including Windsor Castle, Hampton Court Palace and St Paul's Cathedral. He carved solely in Lime and created a style that seemed to stretch the boundaries of craftsmanship to levels never attempted before. His work was so detailed and delicate that people could not fully comprehend that the material was merely wood. Art historian Horatio Walpole 4th Earl of Orford (1717 - 1797) wrote of Gibbons - "There is no instance of a man before Gibbons who gave wood the loose and airy lightness of flowers and chained together the various productions of the elements with the free disorder natural to each species". One of his most famous pieces of work commissioned by Charles II and sent as a gift to the Duke of Tuscany, Cosimo III de Medici (1642-1723) is called the "Cosimo Panel" and can be found today at the Palazzo Pitti in Florence. To describe the work in words is almost impossible. It is a collection of floral, musical, human and symbolic

items treated with the most extreme naturalism, of which Gibbons was capable.

After the great restoration period post World War II that provided employment for many wood workers, woodcarving slipped more into the hobbyist arena to the point where there are few professional workshops operating today. Woodcarvers have had to create a new niche for themselves. Even though advances in tool design and development have made the woodcarving process faster, only top artists such as Ian Norbury, Chris Pye and Michael Painter can make a comfortable living from their work.

The internet and social media has opened up a worldwide shop window for up and coming woodcarvers of my generation, giving us the potential of a worldwide audience. I started my woodcarving career with books by Ian Norbury and Chris Pye, a small set of tools and lots of passion.

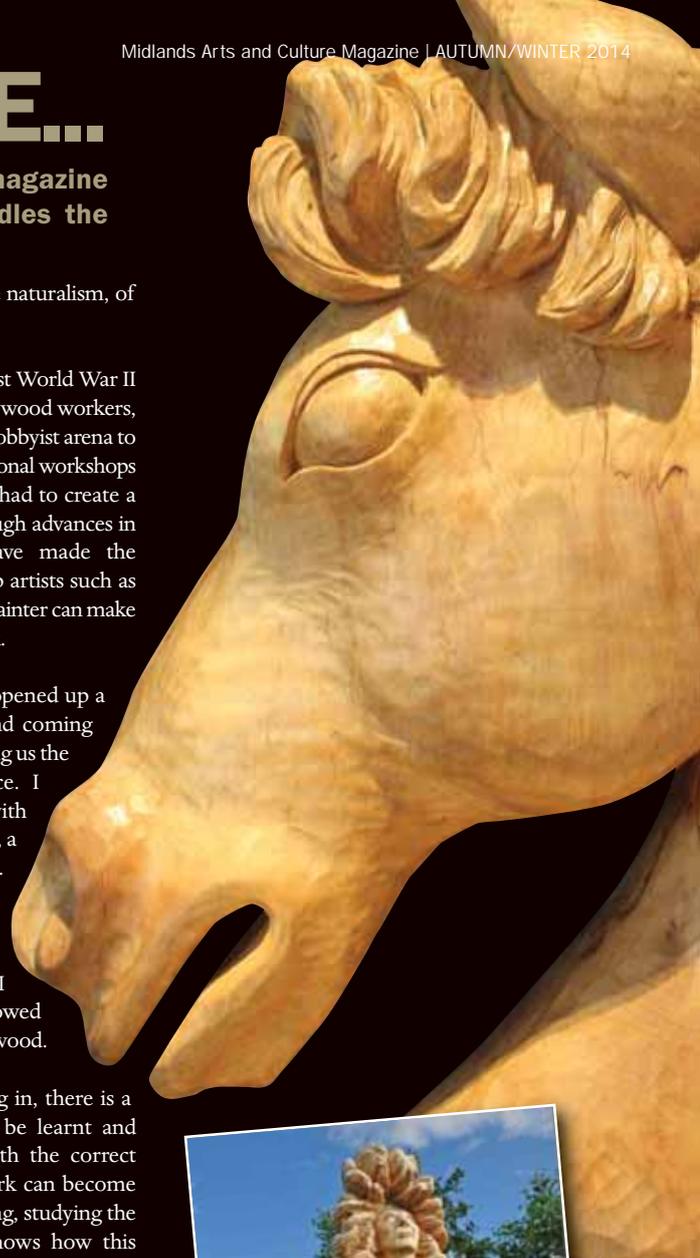
I discovered that wood carving allowed me so many ways to express myself and develop my work with wood. From my earliest attempts I was hooked on the process that allowed me to pull an image or form out of wood.

Whatever medium you are working in, there is a craft or skill involved that has to be learnt and mastered. It is only then, that with the correct attitude and commitment your work can become high art. With regard to wood carving, studying the excellent work of Ian Norbury shows how this ancient craft can transcend from noble craftsmanship to high artistry.

My woodcarving journey is in its 21st year and I am as passionate as ever. I love to create all types of woodcarvings, from my small quirky characters to 12' high chainsaw carvings. Before I get to work on a piece of Lime with hand tools or a log with chainsaw, many hours of preparation will have taken place. Once I have decided what image I want to create from a particular piece of wood, its design needs to be worked out. This involves sketches of many views of the piece and for more complex designs I will create a clay maquette to work from. As with all art media, design plays a large part and the piece's eventual success or failure depends on the work invested at this stage of the process. No amount of detail or good toolmanship will save a poor design.

Woodcarving has enriched my life immensely and opened up avenues of opportunity that I would never have dared travel before. My woodcarving journey has brought me to some interesting places and introduced me to even more interesting people. When doing large commissions in public places, people will stop and engage with the piece and the work in progress, making this type of woodcarving highly interactive and enjoyable.

I challenge myself as much as possible as this is the only way to improve and totally master my craft ...



my art. I believe woodcarving encompasses both craft and art disciplines and that it cannot be pigeon-holed into either category. The woodcarving journey for me has been well worth taking and I am loving every single moment of it.



The Cathedral of Christ the King

Mullingar

A Russian love story and Persian and Chilean Lapis Lazuli panels... as the Cathedral of Christ the King, Mullingar celebrates the 75th anniversary of its consecration in 1939, Historian and Writer Ruth Illingworth reflects on the exotic and international visual stories contained within this magnificent structure.

The Cathedral of Christ the King, Mullingar was consecrated 75 years ago this year. Built between 1932 and 1935 it opened in July 1936 and was dedicated the following September. It replaced an earlier building dating back to 1836. The Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, as it was called had served the Roman Catholic people of Mullingar well enough but was considered by Bishop Matthew Gaffney (1899-1905), to be too small and “without an atom of art to relieve it”.

Commencing in 1932 and completed in 1935 the architect for the new cathedral was Ralph Byrne. At the suggestion of Pope Pius XI the cathedral was dedicated to Christ the King. The consecration in 1939 was celebrated by a High Mass on September 3rd, the day the Second World War began.

The Bishop who oversaw the building of the cathedral, Dr. Thomas Mulvany (1929-1943) was determined that the new building would contain many fine works of art to enhance the significance and beauty of the cathedral.

Albert Power: Over the main entrance to the cathedral is the Tympanum. This is a sculpture in Portland stone, created by Power who was one of the most important figures in Irish Art in the first half of the 20th century. Power, R.H.A. trained at the Metropolitan School of Art and was commissioned to do the Tympanum in Mullingar Cathedral in 1936. The work depicts the Blessed Virgin with cherubim giving as an offering to her Son, Christ the King, a model of the old Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception. On her left are the figures of St. Peter and St. Patrick. On the right are

the figures of Pope Pius XI, Bishop Thomas Mulvany of Meath, and the then Primate of All Ireland, Cardinal MacRory.

William Early: The historian of Mullingar Cathedral, Rev. Dr. Paul Connell has stated that; *“To William Earley and his dedicated staff we owe much that is so beautiful in the cathedral. They provided the sanctuary floor, the High Altar, the Apse, the altar rails and the front pillars in the sanctuary. In addition they were responsible for the Stations of the Cross, the pulpit, the end wall of the Blessed Sacrament Chapel, the stained glass in the cathedral, and all the altars in the side chapels with the exception of the Blessed Sacrament Chapel.”* It is said that Bishop Mulvany told an American visitor who asked him what the style of the new cathedral was, *“On the outside it is Renaissance, on the inside it is Earley.”*

The most striking example of the art work done by Early's firm in the cathedral between 1936 and 1939 is the magnificent mosaic of the Ascension above the High Altar in the apse. It is composed of nineteen figures and six cherub angels. The central figure is Christ crowned by two angels and accompanied by two others. On the ground are two other angels along with Our Lady, St Peter and the other ten disciples. There is a Latin inscription at the base of the mosaic—"Regnum meum non est de hoc mundo" meaning "My kingdom is not of this world." The Stations of the Cross were completed in 1937 and have been described as the most successful in Ireland. Crafted out of pieces of coloured tile, the figures are as Fr. Connell noted in his history of the cathedral "rendered distinct not only by a judicious blend of colours but also by an outline of gold mosaic."

Oppenheimer Ltd: The Manchester firm of L. Oppenheimer Ltd also contributed to the art work in the cathedral. They were responsible for the mosaic floors in the sanctuary, nave and side aisles, as well as the walls and floors of the Mortuary Chapel and the floors in the chapels of St. Patrick and St. Anne. The floor of the sanctuary is outlined in Brocatello Siena, Levanto, and Rose Aurore marbles, as well as red marble from Kerry. The mosaic panels depict four saints with connections to the Diocese of Meath - Columcille, Finian, Oliver Plunkett and Colman.

Boris Anrep: The most significant art works in the cathedral are the mosaics which were done by Boris Anrep. Born into an aristocratic Russian family in St Petersburg in 1883 Anrep served in the Russian Army during the war. In 1917 he moved to London and became associated with the



Bloomsbury Group. Because of the Communist Revolution he was never able to return to Russia. From the 1920s he worked in Paris and began working on mosaics. His work can be seen in the National Gallery, London, the only examples of his work in Ireland however are in Mullingar Cathedral.

The mosaic in the chapel of Saint Patrick depicts Patrick lighting the first Easter fire in Ireland on the Hill of Slane in AD 433. Patrick is depicted unusually not as an old man with white beard and mitre, but as a young and vigorous figure. Christ is depicted enthroned in Heaven in a manner similar to the Russian Orthodox tradition in which Anrep was raised.

In 1954, Anrep was commissioned by Bishop John Kyne to do a mosaic for the Chapel of Saint Anne. The mosaic represents the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Temple by her mother Saint Anne accompanied by Anne's husband Saint Joachim. The face of Anne was modeled on that of Anrep's former lover, the great Russian/Ukrainian poet, Anna Akhmatova. Known as "Anna of the Russians" Akhmatova was one of the greatest figures in 20th century Russian literature. She and Anrep had been lovers during the First World War but had parted when Anrep returned to Britain just before the Bolshevik Revolution. They continued to correspond but at the time he used her face as the model for Saint Anne they had not seen each other for almost forty years. On the mosaic the name of the saint is spelled "Anna". On the upper part of the mosaic Mary is depicted enthroned in Heaven, in a manner similar to the way the Mother of God is shown in Orthodox iconography. Both Mary and Saint Anne are deeply revered in Russian Orthodoxy and this commission must have meant a great deal to Anrep.

Father Aengus Buckley: Born in Cork in 1913, Aengus Buckley was a member of the Dominican

Order and an artist. He was an authority on the work of Fra Angelico and painted frescos in Dominican churches across Ireland. In 1954, Bishop Kyne commissioned him to do a fresco for what was then the Mortuary Chapel in the cathedral. The fresco depicts Christ rising triumphant from the tomb and is a most powerful work. Fr. Buckley had been in the Irish College in Rome during World War 2 and had helped hide local Jews from the Gestapo during the German Occupation. He lectured at Limerick College of Art for many years. He died in 1977.

Harry Thompson: Harry Thompson from Dublin sculpted four panels to the left and right of the main entrance door of the cathedral. These panels represent the Papal coat of arms, Abraham offering his son Issac in sacrifice, Melchizedek offering sacrifice, and the coat of arms of the diocese of Meath. Directly over the main entrance door is a sculpture, also by Thompson, representing the head of Moses. Thompson also sculpted carved reliefs representing ten of the apostles on the windows on either side of the cathedral.

It can be said without fear of contradiction, that every corner of the cathedral - from the fine stained glass window depicting the baptism of Christ by John the Baptist, to the white marble altar rails with Persian and Chilean Lapis Lazuli panels, and the High Altar with its Tabernacle door coated with twenty two carat gold and ornamented with amethysts in a Celtic design - contains significant artistic work.





LIVE BROADCAST ON NATIONAL TV AND RADIO FOR MOATE CHILDREN'S CHOIR

This was an exciting summer for Moate Children's Choir. After weeks of rehearsals the choir finally performed a 1 hour live Broadcast of the RTÉ religious programme Sunday Worship on RTÉ 1 television, radio and on line.

The thirty strong member choir conducted by Ciarán Brady of Moate and accompanied by Pro-Cathedral Organ Scholar Adam Collins of Mullingar, travelled by coach to the RTÉ Television studios in Donnybrook where they performed a variety of pieces including - Cesar Franck and the Romantic composer Gabriel Faure.

Mons. Bernard Noonan delivered a memorable service which reached thousands of people around the world via the power of the internet. Those who tuned into the live televised and radio broadcast were treated to a message of hope and positivity. The programme was introduced by a 5 minute showcase of the town of Moate. It focused on Moate children's choir itself, and on the positive community activities and initiatives in the town of Moate and the surrounding parishes of Castledaly and Mount Temple.

After the Broadcast, the Choir, servers Amy

Finneran and Ben O'Connell and congregation, that was made up of families and friends of the Choir, were treated to a tour of the Fair City set by RTÉ Director Michael Sweeney and the RTÉ Broadcasting Coordinator Paul G Sheridan.

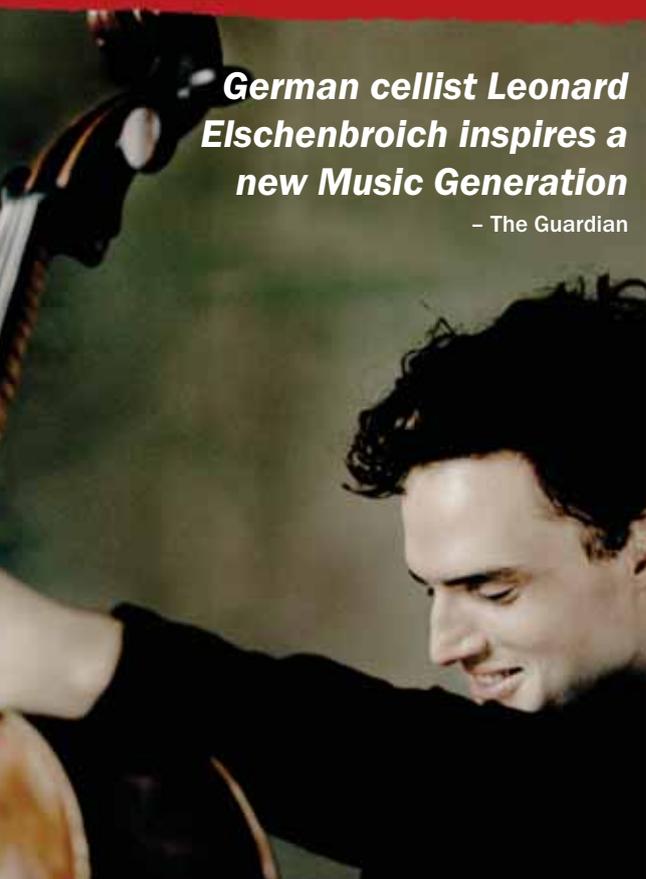
If you missed Sunday Worship or would like another chance to see Moate Children's Choir's performance you can log on to <http://www.rte.ie/player/ie/show/10284236>

Moate Children's Choir was founded in 2007 by its Director Ciaran Brady and is a training ground for young primary school singers in the Midland regions. The average age of the choir is 10 years old. The choir work with sheet music, learn to sight read, and receive vocal training through an enjoyable environment whilst being immersed in fine choral music, which is specifically chosen for the development of young voices. The choir won first place at Limerick Choral Festival 2012 and were

successful at Arklow Music Festival in 2013. In 2011 the Children were gifted with a piece composed for the choir by Colin Mawby after working with him in Master Classes. They have travelled throughout the country for guest performances including a performance at Galway Cathedral last May. In 2013 (after making a recording of a Benjamin Britten work) they were short listed as Finalists in RTÉ Lyric FM's "Choir for Christmas" and were subsequently broadcast on radio.

The choir sing at 10 a.m. Mass every Sunday of the Academic year in their local church, St. Patrick's Church, Moate, where they also perform their annual "Carols For All" Service with Professor Gerard Gillen on Organ.

The Choir rehearse every Thursday in Moate Community Hall and new members are more than welcome to come along at any time and see if they enjoy it.



German cellist Leonard Elschenbroich inspires a new Music Generation

- The Guardian

MY CELLO, MY VOICE

Leonard Elschenbroich is one of the most charismatic cellists of his generation and is touring Ireland this November (including a performance in Birr Theatre and Arts Centre on Sunday Nov 23rd) courtesy of Music Network.

Performing an intriguing programme of music with which he has a deep affinity, Leonard will interweave his playing with anecdotes and stories of personal connections to the pieces. Lauded for his gorgeous, singing tone and wonderfully expressive playing, the young German cellist was chosen as a BBC New Generation Artist in 2012. He has won a slew of awards and performed at many of the world's most prestigious venues, including the Albert Hall, the Auditorium du Louvre and the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam.

Young students of the cello across Offaly and Westmeath will have an opportunity to workshop with Leonard ahead of his

performance in a rare and inspiring opportunity provided by Music Generation Offaly/Westmeath.

Speaking of the opportunity Margaret Broome, Development Officer said, "this is one of those opportunities that shouldn't be missed; last year when we organised the Midlands Youth Orchestra to be mentored by members of the National Symphony Orchestra, it was an inspiring occasion and this, while a more intimate prospect, will be just as rewarding."

Music Network Presents Leonard Elschenbroich this November on his Irish Tour and he will perform at Birr Theatre & Arts Centre on Sunday 23 November, 8pm. Tickets available: www.birrtheatre.com Box Office: 057 9122911

For more information on Music Generation Offaly Westmeath, contact Margaret Broome, mbroome@offalycoco.ie 057 9357400



ONE TO WATCH

Westmeath Artist Avril Corroon likened her NCAD experience to a love affair and maps her journey and passion for the visual arts with eloquence and just the right amount of anarchy.

I have always wanted to make art. As a child I grew up inhaling either the fumes of paint from one end of the house or sawdust from the other. My parents made, painted and sold crafts at fairs. They made rocking horses, dollhouses and various other decorative wooden pieces. I think my interest in creating stemmed from a young instinctual yearning to be just like my dad.

In secondary school I was lucky enough to have had an incredibly enthusiastic and encouraging art teacher, Ms Sweeney, in Rochfortbridge Mercy School. In 5th year, Ms Sweeney took our class to IMMA, where I was for the first time viewing contemporary art. On the guided tour we stopped by Rachel Whiteread's drawings of *House* (1993). Though the drawings themselves had very little of a visual impact on me, I had the most significant experience, realising how limitless art could be. I was astounded by the tour guide's account of the conception of the work and the process of casting the actual house along with the story of Whiteread winning the Turner Prize and the decision by the local authority to demolish *House* the very same day.

I had no idea that art could be facilitated in taking such a scale and form outside the gallery, that public art could be more than a bronze man on a plinth on a road or at a park entrance. I became suddenly aware of how ambitious and expanding art could be and I knew that this was what I wanted to do. It wasn't *House* as an artwork that I was affected by, after all I have never seen it and it was gone long before I had even heard about it. It was the fact that this work had existed and that art could be that or more than that and that I could make it. I felt absolutely limitless, I believe this was a pivotal point in enhancing my desire to go to Art College and hopefully become an artist.

In 2010 I completed my portfolio and was accepted into NCAD. The best thing about NCAD is the people. It's such a fantastic environment to work in, constantly surrounded by both like-minded and wild students and tutors. After a foundation year in Core I chose to study Fine Art Media. There I

learned the technical skills of photography, sound, video and editing as well as performance. The tutors and technicians are really committed to aiding you and pushing you to progress and become proficient in both the conceptual theory and technical side of your work. In my third year Erasmus exchange in Germany I got the opportunity to work in a studio with new people, travel around Europe and see and make art in a completely new environment.

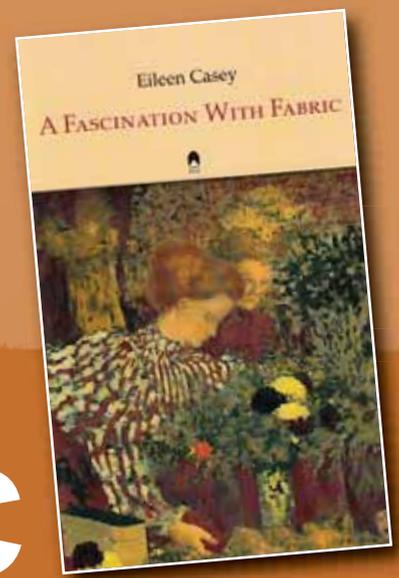
In my final year in NCAD I worked closely with a group of five other students. Immediately after our thesis hand-in we had a group exhibition, 'setup, a device'. The exhibition was in a large vacant warehouse and this show really propelled us forward in our practices right before the degree show; it gave us install experience and provided an opportunity to receive valuable feedback.

My work during 2014 has been pushing the boundaries of facilitation, specifically within NCAD. Working off my relationship with NCAD, I made a series of works which used to my advantage the knowledge of the inner workings of the institution itself. I live on the same street as NCAD, I worked in the library part time, I essentially lived there from 9am to 9pm every weekday. For one work, I tied 100m of rope from my three-story apartment balcony, stretching it over to the roof of the art school. In order for me to gain access to the college roof and not get caught, I had to know what time and day would be the best suited, this depends on what attendant is working, what their bladder and smoke break habits are, the busy library hours, whether it's a Friday so people are too hung over to be about, etc. Once it was up it made the most beautiful line across from my home, on the balcony I could touch this rope which swung all the way over to the place I loved. I staged a series of interventions such as this, they were bold and provoked anger but they were ultimately a romantic gesture. I attempted to woo the college but also caused it heartache like any other lover.

I accumulated together these interventions for my Graduate Show with one final work. A 18m flag pole was cemented into the foundations of NCAD and an 80m rope was tied to the top of this pole and stretched through the campus into my exhibition space which was on the first floor of a building off campus. There it met a video presentation, which tied the series together at its final landing mark. Titled, '*Out the hole, around the tree and back in again*' I referred to the analogy of tying a bowline knot and encompassed the play I have had here with NCAD.

I have just recently been awarded the Recent Graduate Residency with Ormond Studios in Dublin. I will work in their studio on a project for a concluding exhibition and my first solo show later in the year. Winning this is a fantastic opportunity for me to make new work after graduation, which is a time of great uncertainty. There's no job opportunity waiting for you after Art College and there's little support for you. In this economy I can't eat my art or pay the rent with it but I need to make it to feel any value or self worth after the last four years of Art College. At the moment I'm juggling between a job in a busy restaurant in Dublin and managing my art practice, which can be exhausting. I'm continuing to work with my colleagues, I feel it's important to have a support network with similar minded people so you can critique each other's work, exchange feedback and share skills and equipment. Individually we spend a lot of time writing proposals and applying to open submissions for exhibitions so that we can actually make new work. It's become apparent that in order for artists to survive, gain opportunities and continue their practice they must work together and most importantly be a jack-of-all-trades.

The artist's skillset is no longer to primarily be a maker but also be an administrator, a funding manager and an advertiser; self-management is key.



A FASCINATION WITH FABRIC

A new anthology of prose and memoir by Eileen Casey

A Fascination with Fabric, takes its title from a memory inspired by the author's growing up in a house in the Georgian town of Birr, where her mother was a dressmaker. It covers a broad range of topics: One City, One Book, 2014, the passing of Seamus Heaney, Poets at the Whitehouse, Limerick, Meeting William Trevor, The Bayno (The History of the Iveagh Trust), John Hewitt and the Glens of Antrim to driving De Valera's car at Ennis Library, being crowned *Miss Mod* in the '70's in a dancehall in Rathcabbin, Co Offaly, chimney cleaning, travels in the Alps, Kentucky, forest bathing on La Gomera, among a host of

others. This unique collection is informative, entertaining and diverse.

Many of the essays were previously published in *Ireland's Own* to which Casey is a regular contributor, publishing memoir, travel, literature, social history articles.

In the Beginning, was short-listed for The Fish Memoir Prize, 2014. Other prose awards include Listowel Writers' Week, Age & Opportunity Letter Writing Awards and An Post Writing Prize. *From the Royal School*, (a memoir poem) first

appeared in Glenn Patterson's Literary Miscellany in *The Ulster Tatler*.

Eileen Casey, originally from the Georgian town of Birr lives in Tallaght, South Dublin. She has published many books and is the recipient of a Hennessy Literary Award and received a Patrick and Katherine Kavanagh Poetry Fellowship.

A Fascination with Fabric is published by Arlen House and available through arlenhouse@gmail.com and eileencaseyhome@eircom.net

Westmeathartsprojects

A scan of the horizon through the lens of the grants provided by Westmeath County Council Arts Office.

Over the years like all arts offices Westmeath County Council arts office has supported the development of many organisations, projects and individuals. The grants awarded have provided materials to organisations involved in the arts, support for artists to travel for their work, exhibition costs, new equipment and projects in youth and healthcare settings.

'Across the Pond' and 'Birch Trees' are works by artist Hazel Revington Cross two of which were used in the Calor Gas stepping stone garden design in 'Bloom' in the Phoenix Park by garden designer Dawn Aston. The works would have been seen by over 100,000 people. The grant benefited more than just the artist when a percentage of sales of these works was donated to 'Stiggy's Dogs', a charity that rescues dogs and trains them as service dogs for veterans with PTSD. "The grant aid I received goes a huge way towards materials to allow me the freedom to participate in events as they come up and to be able to continue to produce art to help me advance in my technique and style. I am very grateful for the help I receive from Westmeath County Council. It doesn't just go towards enabling an artist to cover costs involved, it also goes towards being able to stay working in a dream career."

Artist Emma Noonan said her grant assisted in print, production and framing of her art work. The money

also went towards the cost of mounts for six new pieces from her ornamented butterfly collection. This assisted her in a group exhibition entitled 'Strong Women'.

David Dunne is a self taught artist who works in both acrylics and oils. He enjoys painting portraits of people who have had an influence in his life from the worlds of sports, music and film. He commented that the grant he received "was a huge help ... for me this year in aiding me in doing a self portrait for submitting to various portrait competitions including The BP portrait awards 2014, Royal Ulster Academy Annual exhibition 2014 and The Hennessy portrait award 2014. The grant helped with material costs, hiring a professional photographer and studio, courier costs and shipping and entry fees."

Eamonn Harrigan, a published author, requested the grant to help him in completing the pilot for his proposed TV series 'Chasing the Black Dog'. The series will be about an academic who is developing an effective model for suicide prevention. "As I work part time to fund my writing efforts, the grant from Westmeath County Council was both vital and welcome in allowing me to take the time that this project needs."

Dolores Keaveney, is an accomplished children's author and artist. She used the support received this year to help with her latest book 'The Scary Spider', which will be launched later this year.

The grants also make some inroads in helping artists grow within their own practice. Hilary Dunne, who will be furthering her studies of dance stated, "I believe these grants are invaluable for artists in the midlands as they help financially while also encouraging people to consider the arts as a viable career option. They help create new works, exhibitions and projects which all add up to the already rich culture of our area."

Writer Anne Holland comments on how the support she received allowed her travel to pursue her writing. She described the grant as "a huge help in a time of diminishing advances but increased costs."

While the amounts available through the Westmeath County Council Arts office have undeniably diminished over the years, over 80 individuals and organisations are in receipt of grants, individual bursaries and project grants each year. The amounts are modest – but in a time of inescapable budgetary constraints it is refreshing to hear some good news stories of real projects that trigger real engagement in the arts in Westmeath.

Stage Presence

By Thomas Matthew Byrne

"I just got off the phone with Don Baker," announces the relatively unassuming figure of renowned singer-songwriter James O'Connor as we both sit down to our respective consumables on an otherwise nondescript Saturday afternoon. The statement is uttered with nary a hint of pretension though – O'Connor is disarmingly casual in his speech but not one at whom accusations of hubris could easily be levelled. In fact, he seems altogether more philosophical about his rise to prominence and current status. "I genuinely feel that like, without music – without songwriting – I don't know what I'd be doing. Obviously, I'd probably be given another gift and be doing something else, but I'd feel empty, you know? There are people that are mechanics and stuff – and that's their gift – I just happen to be a songwriter." And it is this candour that would seem to distinguish him amongst his musical peers, with stalwarts such as Baker taking special note, "That was very strange – it just happened today. He said, 'your writing is excellent; fantastic production.' There was a list of stuff but one thing that stood out to me was, 'your honesty is amazing.' And that seems to be a thing that is coming up the whole time."

Thematically, his latest album, 'Behind the Scenes,' would seem to be most concerned with the pursuit of truth in contemporary Irish society – a punch-drunk and morally bankrupt casualty of the Tiger Era. Indeed, many of the tracks pour considerable scorn over what he perceives to be the fatuous and nihilistic denizens of this un-fair land. "There's a bit of negativity. Not that there's a lot of humour in the songs but there's a bit of sarcasm in there as well – 'you can't take money to the grave' – these are things that people are spending their lives doing; trying to do this and that; getting the job; getting the money – what does it all really mean? That's kind of a sarcastic song about that – missing the bigger picture about what we should be doing." But thankfully, his observations have not blackened into outright cynicism, "What really matters is to

be honest with each other and show compassion and empathy for each other."

For an artist of O'Connor's craft and critical perspective, one could be forgiven for thinking that he has been part of the musical firmament for many years, yet he has only been a practicing professional since 2007. "Yeah, I started playing guitar when I was about 14 or 15 – I was kind of late enough I suppose – and I started learning other people's music. At the time I was into a lot of heavier music and using metal music I was able to come up with stuff for what was happening around me – parents' divorce and stuff like that. And then the music that I was listening to allowed me to get that aggression out. I could go into this world and block out everything else. Way back as far as songs like 'Falling Up' – since about 2007 – these songs have been floating around from incidents that happened then. They never seemed finished – they always seemed to be hanging around in mid-air." His long-time collaborator, violinist Audrey Trainor, also arrived around this time, allowing him to expand the scope of his personal sound. "It seemed to work – my voice and melancholy approach and the violin just complemented each other. It just evolved from there then – we just started playing gigs and got some recordings together. The songs I wrote worked really well with the violin over it."

Despite a promising start, however, a staggered production schedule and the stalled production of a debut album would stymie his burgeoning career for a time, culminating in a parting of the ways after 2010's *Electric Picnic* appearance. "It was all a bit of a mess for a while and that took its toll but during it we got the *Picnic* and we got a band together for it. That was a big buzz during the middle of it but needless to say, the album never happened so that was another kind of knock-back – Audrey went her way and I went my way."

In the wake of this tumult, a kind of regression occurred with a return to education, though

ultimately it paved the way for an eventual regeneration. "I had to start again with different people around me. I went on to college in BIMM (Bristol Institute of Modern Music), which is run through DIT (Dublin Institute of Technology) and I'm in the third year of that – I met the lads on this album through that and we jammed together over the last three years. We just seemed to click and I thought I could do something with this again."

Galvanised by this resurgent self-belief and grassroots support, James embarked on a new iteration of his career, ostensibly sloughing off the emotional ballast from before. But in spite of his tenacity and manifest success, is there a disparity between his public and performance personas? "It's a weird one, but when the attention is on me, I don't like it. I think it's funny that I can get up in front of two hundred people and play and not feel like the attention is on me. It's like one of them is the performer and the other person is the 'real' one, if that makes sense?"

But perhaps it is the synergy between the performer and the audience that provides the fuel for the creation of his coolly-assured presence on stage? "I think that's where people get the buzz – that's where they connect to it. And I try to be honest. Honesty is the way forward and I'm not trying to come up with anything magical – direct lyrics is what I work with. Yeah, it's a kind of energy. When I'm doing the right thing, the right shows – I'm on the right path, I suppose; the right journey. I'm on the one that was laid out for me."





Orbus Theatre

An innovative and exciting new production company in Longford

Many decades ago touring theatrical companies were not unusual in Ireland. For most people living in the country it was the only chance they ever had to experience live theatre.

While traveling to a larger urban centre to see a theatrical production is no longer the major effort it used to be, a new venture in Longford is aiming to bring theatre to the people in their own communities.

Men and they hope to bring the script to life at venues around the midlands. For more details check out the Orbus Facebook page and via their website www.orbustheatre.com.

Orbus is a new production company which will specialise in a style of theatre called "in the round". Fronted by artistic director Noel Strange, Orbus is practicing this seldom used art form which allows for a more intimate setting.

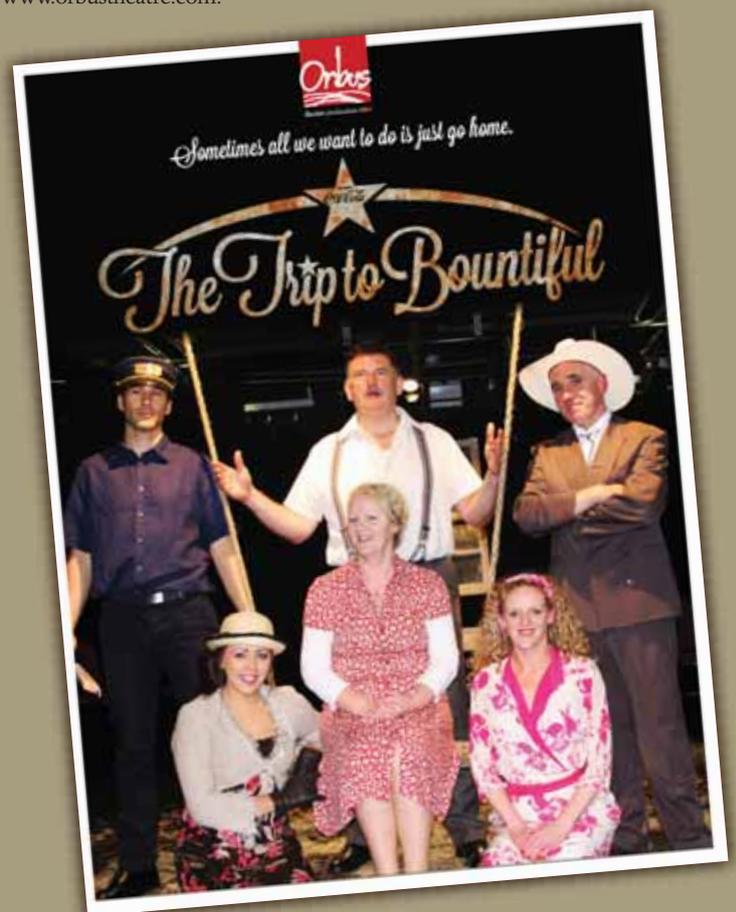
Speaking from their rehearsal space in the old convent in Newtownforbes, Noel explained the concept. "We're unique as it is theatre in the round which is quite unusual. Most theatres are proscenium, where the audience sit and look at a box set, but this one is different because the audience sit around the set. It is far more intimate; we are restricting our size to fifty people.

"The global experience of it has been 'wow, that was so intimate' as everyone has a front row seat." The beauty of the theatre in the round concept is that it can be performed pretty much anywhere – the local hotel, bar lounge, school, church hall.

Primarily based in Newtownforbes, the theatre group will tour each production bringing the format to every location they perform. "There is very little of it being done at the moment, especially touring. The way we're set up is that we can bring the structure that we have developed here on tour with us. It is the same show wherever we go."

Noel added "the main point is that we are not a theatre, we are a production company which is based here. We hope to use it as a hub to bring professional actors down and make it a centre for symposiums and workshops."

The first production they toured was "The Trip to Bountiful" by Horton Foote. They are now working on a production of John Steinbeck's classic *Of Mice And*



BRIGHTLIGHT EXTINGUISHED

Public Access Arts in Edenderry closed its doors August 2014. It was a not for profit, innovative and voluntarily run arts venue that had fantastic success engaging artists, and new audiences. They are extremely proud of an 18 month long project that attracted and engaged with all ages, including 16 local schools.

It brought exhibitions and visitors from Dublin and the surrounding counties to the town and participated in the national key culture days, such as Culture Night, Bealtaine and National Music Day. The refreshing bright light in a town of closed shop fronts is sadly no more.

Despite some financial support from the Arts Office and a small one off grant from the former Edenderry Town Council, it was not enough to continue to run and develop the project, and other support from key stakeholders in the local community was required. Therefore, it is with great regret that they bring the project to a close. In a statement, the eight directors of Public Access Arts took the opportunity to thank everyone who took part and supported the project. "What we achieved together was significant, courageous and spirited and the creative links and friendships made will continue."

for this Sunday at noon event. Singing a selection of favorites from Carol King to Sting.

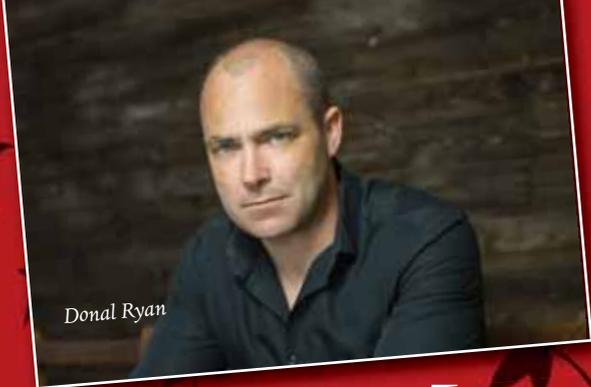
On Saturday 8th November in the Dunamais Arts Centre, Colm Keegan will conduct a workshop for teens, editing and preparing work for reading on stage. Participants are invited to bring along work which will be honed for performance. The workshop will be followed by an Open Mic session open for the public. Young People from the age of 15 to 20 years are invited to bring along their spoken word pieces, stories, poems and raps in preparation for the show following the workshop.

Workshop is €10 per participant and free admission to the Open Mic Event. **Workshop limited to 15 participants. Workshop is from 11.00am-2.00pm and 2.30-4.00pm. Open Mic event 4.30pm**

Colm Keegan is a poet and writer from Clondalkin, Dublin. He is current DLR writer in Residence and his book *Don't Go There* is available at www.salmonpoetry.com.

Castle Durrow Hotel Castle Durrow Hotel on 057-8736555

Tickets for each reading is €15 or €40 covering all three events. Bookings for all Literary events can be made at the Dunamais Arts Centre Tel: 057 8663355. www.dunamais.ie and further information from the Arts Office, Laois County Council T: 057 8664033 / 13 E: artsoff@laoiscoco.ie. Website: www.laois.ie



Donal Ryan

Leaves Literary Festival 2014

Celebrating the Literary Arts in Laois, 7, 8 & 9 November 2014

Celebrating its sixth year, the annual Leaves Literary Festival 2014, promises a pleasing variety of Irish writing and music. On Friday the 7th November at 8.00pm, the Laois Arthouse & Library is the venue for readings from bestselling novelist Donal Ryan and poet Louis de Paor. Musical accompaniment on the night by renowned Uilleann Piper, Séan Mc Keon.

Donal Ryan is from Nenagh, Co. Tipperary. He lives in Limerick with his wife Anne Marie and their two young children. He is Writer-in-Residence at the University of Limerick. Donal's number one bestselling debut novel, The Spinning Heart, co-published by The Lilliput Press and Doubleday Ireland, won two Irish Book Awards in 2012 and the Guardian First Book Award in 2013. It was a finalist for the IMPAC Dublin Literary Award and was long-listed for the Man Booker Prize and the Desmond Elliott Prize. Donal's second novel, The Thing About December, topped the Irish bestseller charts shortly after its release in October 2013. It was shortlisted for Novel of the Year at the Irish Book Awards 2013 and was on the five-strong shortlist for the Kerry Group Novel of the Year for 2014. Donal's novels are published worldwide and have been translated into several languages.

Louis de Paor has been involved with the contemporary renaissance of poetry in Irish since 1980 when he was first published in the poetry journal Innti which he subsequently edited for a time. A four times winner of the Oireachtas prize for the best collection of poems in Irish, he lived in Australia from 1987 to 1996. Ag greadadh bas sa reilig/Clapping in the cemetery was published by Cló IarChonnacht in 2005 and a second bilingual volume agus rud eile de/and another thing (2010) includes artwork by Kathleen Furey and a recording of poems with musical settings by Ronan Browne. A new bilingual selection of his early work, The brindled cat and the nightingale's tongue, has just been published by Bloodaxe.

Séan Mc Keon comes from a family steeped in Irish musical heritage. In 2005 he was awarded the TG4 Young Traditional Musician of the Year. Sean has performed with Noel Hill, Séan Keane, Steve Cooney and Dónal Lunny as well as forging an exciting duet with fiddle player Liam O'Connor. Sean is also a member of the Damien Dempsey band, performing around the world with the Dublin singer/songwriter, a highlight of which was supporting U2 in Croke Park during their 360 tour. Sean appears on Dempsey's most recent album "Almighty Love", which was nominated for a Meteor Choice Music Prize. He has played on

several albums, and last year, McKeon release a much anticipated solo piping album "To the City". Séan was joined on the recording by Liam O'Connor (fiddle) and John Blake (guitar)

An evening with Sr Caravaggio, takes place in the elegant Castle Durrow Hotel on the 8th November at 8.00pm, the recently published *Sister Caravaggio* will be brought to life by some of the contributors to the novel including Peter Cunningham, Cormac Millar, Peter Sheridan and Éilís Ní Dhuibhne. A small Caravaggio painting hangs in the chapel of Doon Abbey in Kildare, which attracts visitors to the abbey from afar. One night, however, the painting disappears... The Sister Superior is unwilling to cooperate with the police, as this would compromise the abbey's silent-order ethos. Alice Dunwoody, a novice at the abbey who heard strange sounds on the night of the theft, persuades Sister Mercy Superior to allow her to investigate, with the help of the abbey's computer-savvy librarian, Sister Mary Magdalene. As the nuns try to track down the painting, the list of possible suspects – and the body count – multiplies.

The mystery continues to weave a web of intrigue in each of the book's chapters. Devised and edited by Peter Cunningham and written by a cast of well-known Irish writers, *Sister Caravaggio* builds into a seamlessly woven work of fiction, rich with humour, energy and suspense - not least the unsolved mystery of which author actually wrote each chapter. Described as a light-hearted crime caper featuring a rich cast of characters and written by a star-studded team of authors, *Sister Caravaggio* takes readers to an abbey in Kildare filled with mystery, intrigue and murder.

Sunday at Noon in Castle Durrow Hotel is the setting for readings by Poet and Novelist Mary Ó Donnell, Poet Noel Monahan and music by *Vocalese*. Mary will read from her recently published new novel 'Where They Lie' was described as "a timeless story of loss, grief and tribal loyalties . . . seamlessly achieved". *The Irish Independent* remarks that "She is a beautiful observer of the minutiae of social distinction." Noel will read from his recent publication *Where The Wind Sleeps, New & Selected Poems*, published in May 2014.

Vocalese will present their exquisite vocal harmonies for all to enjoy. Nuala, Georgina and Vivienne's dulcet tones are guaranteed to be the fitting recipe

RECHARGE:

Free Group Mentoring Opportunities for Laois Artists, Musicians and Writers 2-5pm, Friday 17th October 2014 Arthouse, Stradbally, Co Laois

Are you a professional artist, musician or writer based in Laois? Would you like some practical support to develop your practice and recharge your batteries? Are you interested in meeting, or collaborating with, other creative people working in the county? If so, The Laois Arts Office invite you to apply for two free mentoring workshops with artist/filmmaker Lisa Fingleton in 2014

The workshops will be highly participative and practical. You will be supported to take stock of where you are now and plan for the future. The content will respond to your needs so please let us know on booking if there are particular priorities for you (e.g. developing opportunities to showcase your work, creating a sustainable practice, networking, engaging with social media etc)

At the first session, each participant will have the option to introduce themselves and their work at the start of the session, in order to get to know each other (max 3 mins each). You are invited to bring up to 3 images or examples of your work, if relevant (hard copy or memory stick is fine). The second session is a follow on from the first one, so a commitment to attend both sessions is required.

Please complete the application form available on request from the Arts Office, Laois County Council Tel: 057 8664013 / 33 or from the website www.arthouse.ie and return to artsoff@laoiscoco.ie (Places are limited to 15 and will be allocated on a first come first served basis).

www.lisafingleton.com
www.thehappyartist.ie



FOUNDATION 14 ARTISTS AWARDS

Foundation 14 set into preview mode what an arts centre in Tullamore would bring as it took over empty spaces around the town in September. The three floors of gallery space in a former electrical shop, other unused shops around the town and performance art events, audiences were mesmerized with one overheard on the opening night saying "Tullamore is like Berlin tonight!" The lineup of artists included Susan MacWilliam, Aileen Barry, Anita Delaney and Thomas Brezging to name just a few of the 50+ artists who took part this year.

Dr. Kevin Atherton, a renowned international artist (who revives his work Monitor Minder 30 years after its 1984 Tate showing) spoke about how important it is for Tullamore to celebrate being in 'the middle.' He said, "People think, disparagingly, that being in the middle, is neither here nor there. But being in the middle is the most exciting place to be. Being in the centre is where artists need to be, to occupy that space in between allows an artist to question and observe differently our world."

Paula Fitzsimon's performance art piece captivated as she theatrically blew red orange powder pigment into a bunch of white roses across a dining table; her mentor, the renowned Nigel Rolfe, looked on and assisted with sound.

Critic's Choice Award at Foundation 14 went to Andrew Carson for his installation "Hey, that's no way to say goodbye" who won €500 and a solo exhibition in the NAG Gallery and the Graduate Award went to Avril Corroon for "Out the hole, around the tree and back again" who won €1,000 towards furthering her career.

The programme was created by director/curator Brendan Fox with support from a team of artists, Offaly County Council Arts Office, Tullamore Community Arts Centre and the Arts Council, other support has been generously extended by individuals, businesses, volunteers and the many local groups who participated.

For full details go to www.foundation14.com or follow Foundation 14 on Facebook.



CANVAS TO CATWALK

Hazel Greene's vibrant colour lands her a place in the final of the Irish Fashion Innovation Awards and alongside Alexander McQueen!

Visual artist and textile designer, Hazel Greene, has had an extremely busy 2014 so far; travelling to Milan to oversee the printing of a new collection of Italian silk scarf designs, being a finalist in the 2014 Irish Fashion Innovation Awards, studying in the UK with award-winning fashion designer Emma Burton, preparing for her forthcoming exhibition at Birr Theatre and co-ordinating the visual arts trail for the annual Birr Vintage Week & Arts Festival as well as teaching painting at her studio.

Hazel's vibrant and colourful works are instantly recognisable but it might surprise to know that she draws inspiration from black and white images! Hazel remembers the impulse that inspired her first original scarf – a Christmas gift for friends. "I wanted to give a gift of quality and something personal and came up with the idea of painting silk scarves". The scarves were a success straight away.

Last year Hazel experimented with printed silk and went on to create a new collection of quality scarves printed on the finest Italian hand rolled silk twill (and was tickled to see her designs in

production alongside Alexander McQueen's!). The resulting collection earned Hazel a nomination for 'Accessory Designer of the Year' Award and achieved her a place in the finals of this year's Irish Fashion Innovation Awards. These prestigious awards give visibility, support and a voice to design talent throughout Ireland, offering an unrivalled opportunity for designers' work to be shown on the catwalk to a jury made up of fashion design experts.

Not denying her first love of painting, Hazel will exhibit a new collection of work at Birr Theatre & Arts Centre for the month of November 2014.

Hazel Greene trained at IADT (1994-98) and has studied painting under Una Sealy, Mick O'Dea, and Joe Dunne. She has shown work in exhibitions curated by Peter Prendergast, Claudia Woolgar and Martina Finn. Greene has been visual arts co-ordinator of Birr Vintage Week and Arts Festival since 2010 and has teaches painting in the community and from her own studio. www.hazलगreenie.ie www.bramberstudio.com.

Screening of *Sitting* Documentary

***Sitting*, is the title that was given to the residency at the Laois Arthouse, Stradbally, Co Laois, which took place from 11 – 20 July 2014, when 35 people took up the invitation to have their portrait painted by Nick Miller.**

The one hour encounter between Miller and the sitters was captured in watercolour paint. Over the course of the residency Miller also painted the portraits of Laois born writer Pat Boran and Sculptor Cathy Carmen in oil. These portraits are a welcome addition to the Laois Arts Collection. Considerable interest was expressed locally and nationally with the Irish Times and Arena, RTE as well as local media reporting on the residency. The residency was documented by *award winning artist and film maker Lisa Fingleton*.

Miller moved from London to Ireland in 1984, and has been based in Co Sligo since 1992. His work, whatever his subject: a person, an object, or landscape, is concerned with portraiture and with how we experience and meet the world. The theme for this residency continued a long term involvement with contemporary portraiture that is central to his artistic practice and more particularly follows from a project Miller carried out in

Brooklyn, NYC, where he spent 40 days painting a portrait a day.

A selection of Miller's portrait works from the IMMA Art Collection were exhibited also, generating a welcome collaboration with the Laois Arthouse. An open day also took place with Christina Kennedy, of IMMA interviewing Miller at the end of his residency, reflecting on how it went. A publication documenting the residency will be published later in the Autumn.

This project was funded by the Percent for Art Scheme and Laois County Council. Nick Miller is represented by Rubicon Gallery /Projects. More info at www.rubicongallery.ie and on the artist at www.nickmiller.ie



Sitting was curated by Arts Officer, Muireann Ní Chonaill. further details from mnichona@laoiscoco.ie 0578664109.

WRITERS TAKE UP NEW RESIDENCE

A new writer's residency is underway in Offaly, with writers Órfhlaith Foyle, Iggy McGovern and Mary Russell being the first recipients of the new bursary this October.

Tin Jug Studio in Birr has long been a local hub for artists' gatherings, workshops and talks including poetry readings and Irish language film screenings. Whilst it is in the heart of a busy rural town during the daytime, stepping in through the front door, beyond the high walls there is a peacefulness of atmosphere from which many have drawn inspiration from over the years.

Developing a writer's residency was Rosalind's brainchild. No stranger is she or her husband to writing, she knows well the need for 'space' to create, especially from her own experience of attending the Tyrone Guthrie Centre to concentrate on writing. "I loved the experience, and how a new place can spring new ideas, but especially meeting like minded souls around that communal table at Annamakerrig. I know Birr has a lot to offer artists of all disciplines, visiting visual artists, musicians and filmmakers love coming here, and many stay! There weren't as many opportunities to attract visiting writers, so I created one!" she says unreservedly.

She applied for funding to Offaly County Council and was successful in attracting a grant to develop the residency as a pilot. "It really is a case of let's try it and see. I was delighted with the response from writers who were interested and very grateful to distinguished author Malcolm Ross McDonald and

Arts Officer Sinéad O'Reilly in helping select who would make the best use of the opportunity."

Órfhlaith Foyle was born in Africa to Irish parents and lives in Galway. Her first novel was published in 2005 to critical acclaim. A collection of poetry and short stories, followed. 'Somewhere in Minnesota' is the title story of her forthcoming short fiction collection and she is currently working on her second novel.

Mary Russell was born in Dublin and is a renowned travel and short story writer. Her books are *The Blessings of a Good Thick Skirt* (1986); *Please Don't Call it Soviet Georgia* (1991); *Journeys of a Lifetime* (2002) and *My Home is Your Home, a journey around Syria* (2011). She is a regular guest writer and speaker at literary festivals internationally.

Iggy McGovern was born in Coleraine and now lives in Dublin and is known equally for his work as a poet and scientist. He has published three collections of poetry, *The King of Suburbia*, *Safe House* and *A Mystic Dream of 4*; He won the inaugural Glen Dimplex New Writers Award for Poetry and the Hennessy Award for Poetry and The Ireland Chair of Poetry Bursary.



Órfhlaith Foyle



Iggy McGovern



Mary Russell

Fabulous Beast



Described as 'one of the most daring and highly original dance theatre companies in the world' (The Times), Fabulous Beast Dance Theatre is an international ensemble based in County Longford, led by Artistic Director Michael Keegan-Dolan.

His productions for Fabulous Beast include: Sunday Lunch (1997), Fragile (1999), The Flowerbed (2000), The Christmas Show (2001), Giselle (2003), The Bull (2005), James Son of James (2007), The Rite of Spring (2009, a co-production with English National Opera), Helen + Hell (2010), and Rian (2011).

Most recently, he directed and choreographed a new Stravinsky double bill, The Rite of Spring & Petrushka, which opened at Sadler's Wells, London in April 2013. It has since appeared at the Galway Arts Festival and the Brisbane and Melbourne Festivals, Australia.

His production of Rian won a Bessie Award (New York Dance and Performance Awards) in 2013 and was nominated for a 2011 Irish Times Theatre Award.

Fabulous Beast is known for several ground-breaking and controversial productions, delivered in a unique style blending narrative and physical theatre, dance, and song and set in the Irish Midlands. These include two more Olivier Award-nominated productions, Giselle (2003) and The Bull (2005), and also James Son of

James (2007), which were co-produced with the Dublin Theatre Festival and Bite at the Barbican Centre (London), of which Fabulous Beast was an Artistic Associate.

Fabulous Beast has gained wide international recognition through performances at major cultural festivals around the world.

Below Michael explains why Fabulous Beast is based in Longford.

Stamping on the earth while staring at the sky in County Longford

By Michael Keegan Dolan

I grew up in Dublin but my father was from Longford and that always felt important. Although he had left Longford to work in Dublin in the early 1940's, his heart had remained at the cottage and 16 acres where he grew up with his mother and grandaunt, not far from the Leitrim border.

I travelled to London when I was 18 to train and work as a dancer and choreographer, but like my father I dreamt about one day returning to the midlands. I founded Fabulous Beast Dance Theatre in 1997 and in 2005 after my father's death, I moved back to the old family cottage and with my partner, Rachel Poirier, began work restoring the house and cultivating organic vegetable and fruit gardens. Fabulous Beast has been based here ever

since. I now have two children, Milo (5) and Ellie (3). They play in the meadow where my great-great grandfather made hay and this brings a broad smile to my face.

Fabulous Beast Dance Theatre has performed in some of the most prestigious and important venues and festivals around the world from London to Rome, Paris, Lyon, New York, Sydney, Melbourne, Hong Kong, Singapore, Stockholm and Berlin. The company has been nominated for three Olivier Awards in London, has won an Irish Times Theatre Award, a Critic's Circle - Dance UK Award and in 2013, a prestigious Bessie Award in New York City. I regularly receive invitations to create work or give workshops at some of the finest dance companies in the world. And in spite of this international profile, almost all of the company's work

has been rooted in the Midlands, from 2003 onwards all the early rehearsals were located in county Longford, with dancers travelling from all over the world to take up residence here. All the themes and the energy of the creations have had their source in the Midlands.

Longford is at the same time both an inspiring and challenging place, a place to make vivid and brilliant art.

My aspiration now is to build or acquire a space near my home, which will be the home of Fabulous Beast Dance Theatre; I aim to create work there, to lead workshops in dancing, yoga, singing and percussion there and to invite artists from all over the world to come and experience the magic, beauty and power of the midlands. A place my father loved.

MidlandsArts andCultureMagazine

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

