

Midlands Arts and Culture Magazine

A REVIEW OF THE ARTS IN LAOIS, LONGFORD, OFFALY AND WESTMEATH WINTER 2013

ISSUE

20

THE WRITTEN WORD
MUSIC & DANCE
THEATRE & FILM
VISUAL ARTS

FREE

converscapes

conversations overheard on a daily amble

a train going into my head, it just hasn't reached the station yet
expecting the priest to call, but he was dead... so, i just a
ould marry me... once your c and your sound... the woman
'your just going to have lifestyle start a new life
look at the state of n k she heard me...
e out of here, please t ut, you are not that
there's going to be e any trouble, yes th
g ya, we're fucked... ld for another 3 ye
i've really forward to...
you won't be home for ha e home for christmas...
fruit?... no, the man we from died, so we haven't
it since... at this stage ga nking about dying...
i should have runners...





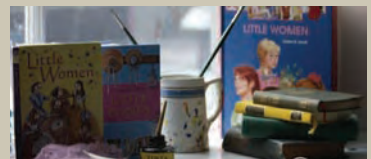
5 TULLAMORE CHOIR TAKING OVER THE CHORAL WORLD



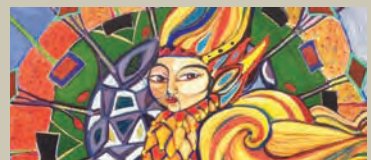
16-17 LONGFORD SHOWS ITS LOVE- THE INAUGURAL 'LOVE IN LONGFORD' TOOK PLACE



22 MARY CLIFFORD IS MAKING TRACKS IN THE ART WORLD



24 LITTLE LAOIS WOMEN- SCHOOLS INSPIRED BY NOVEL



36 LET'S CONNECT: ARTISTS TAKE ON MENTAL HEALTH

New Script Festival.....	Page 3
Remembering Vinny Baker • Briefs	
Movie Makers Bring Midlands Back in Time.....	Page 4
The Naked Truth of the Painted Word	
Taking the Choral World by Storm.....	Page 5
Longford Poet Poet published New Poems	
Laois School of Music Approved for Funding	
Psychotic Episodes.....	Page 6
New Artist in Residence for German who has made German Artist returns for Inspiration	
2013 Arthouse Studio Awards	
And That's a Wrap!	Page 7
Athlone Literary Festival • Briefs	
Tuesdays with Morrie	Page 8
Green is Pink	
Culture night in Laois	Page 9
New School Launched in honor James Fintan Lalor	
Culture night in Offaly.....	Page 10
Culture night in Westmeath.....	Page 11
Artist Pat Byrne Shares his Experiences.....	Page 12
Singing her way to Success	
Young Longford Pianist has Keys to Success.....	Page 13
Knitting their way into the Movies	
Glimpses of James Fintan Lalor through the Eyes of Children with Ann Egan.....	Page 14
Lus Na Gréine	
Longford Schools Photographer of the Year.....	Page 15
OFFline Film Festival Stages Sequel	
Love In Longford	Page 16-17
Dunamais Open Call	Page 18
Slieve Bloom's Storytelling Festival	
A spark of Genius.....	Page 19
Longford's biggest ever Choral Performance	
Offaly Libraries Autumn Author Visits	
Children's Festivals	Page 20
Exploration of an Old process	Page 21
Independence Hero Unveiled by Taosieach	
Mary Clifford	Page 22
Offaly Youth Theatre Expands to Edenderry	Page 23
Little Women.....	Page 24
Artist Karen Hendrey is Shaped by The Absent Ocean....	Page 25
Time and Place Captured	Page 26
John Lennon Bus Parks up	
Tullamore Lay Foundations for Town Art	
St Colmcille's Pipe Band.....	Page 27
Ballet Ireland puts Best Foot Forward in Laois	
RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra in Tullamore	
Gerard Byrne.....	Page 28-29
Luan Gallery Showcases Music and Visual Arts and Scoops Major Award.....	Page 29
Music Generation Offaly/Westmeath.....	Page 30
In the Can (but not in the Cannes).....	Page 31
Laois Youth Theatre Open call	
Who is Eillean Coghlan?.....	Page 32
LLiterary awards acknowledges Longford Writers...Page 33	
Westmeath Volunteers injecting magic into the Midlands	
Bridge, Bellows and Bow for Emo	Page 34
There's something about Shinrone	
New Legends from Old Woods.....	Page 35
Angela Delaney talks about her work	Page 36
Let's Connect	
Mullingar Town Band.....	Page 37
Laois arts programme 2013.....	Page 38
Luan gallery showcases music and visual arts	
Athlone Castle	Page 39



A Word from the Editor

Welcome to the latest issue of the Midlands Arts and Culture Magazine and thank you to those who sent in their stories.

This issue stretches to 40 pages – and it could have stretched to many more. There is such a wealth of varying arts and Culture activities across the Midlands that it can sometimes be overwhelming when trying to select events and works to showcase.

I constantly find it a source of wonder that despite the many cuts to arts funding, the Midlands still manages to flourish – and that's in no small part to the hard work of its Art Officers and the tireless effort of volunteers. They must be commended.

However, we must ensure that the benefit of arts and culture to our communities is highlighted loudly and often in order to retain existing funding and secure new support.

Much has happened since the last issue including the appointment of a new Arts Officer for Westmeath. However, Miriam Mulrennan is no stranger to Westmeath, having previously held the position of Manager of the Athlone Arts and Heritage Ltd. In that role Miriam oversaw a number of Art and Heritage sites, facilities and amenities under development in Athlone including Luan Gallery and Athlone Castle. Undoubtedly her expertise and talents will be put to great use in her new role.

This year sees some great events and exhibitions across the Midlands sure to attract some new followers to the arts.

One such event is Culture Night which is almost upon us once again and is a great initiative to enable everyone to experience the arts for free.

A play which has been specially commissioned based on the writings of James Fintan Lalor will be treading the boards in Laois. And in Offaly Pop up Poetry will be performed by Richard Brennan and the Tullamore Rhymer.

And Mullingar visitors should prepare themselves to be Yarn Bombed when various objects around the town will be all snuggled up with colourful displays of knitting and crocheting to showcase the long practised art.

A number of other festivals are highlighted throughout the magazine with some brand new ones being launched. One which particularly took my fancy was the Love in Longford festival. And, despite the name there's no funny business! Displaying the wealth of artistic talent locally through pop up art and literary exhibitions, and live musical performances was the real name of the game.

Angela Madden
Editor

Gary Robinson is pictured on the front cover. Pic taken by Shelley Corcoran.

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Briefs

Michael Harding and Paul Durcan for Leaves Literary Festival

The Leaves Literary Festival promises wonderful opportunities to listen to the very best of writing established and emerging from Ireland with a programme which includes readings, workshops in creative writing, talks, children's events and music.

NOV 8

The Festival commencing on Friday, November 8 includes a wonderful evening of readings and music with contributors such as Michael Harding, Rita Kelly, Donal Ryan and Mary O'Donnell starting at 8pm in the Arthouse, Stradbally, Co Laois. Earlier that day a popular award winning author Grace Wells will pay a visit to Mountmellick Girls NS and give a reading in Mountmellick Library.

NOV 9

On Saturday 9th November, from 11am-4pm, writer's workshops titled 'Getting Started in Writing' to take place in the Dunamaisie Arts Centre hosted by Rita Kelly. The workshops will be followed at 4.15pm by a very interesting and entertaining talk on the writings of Samuel Beckett, by Dr Arthur Broomfield.

An evening with writer Paul Durcan will take place in the wonderful surroundings of Preston House, Abbeyleix. Paul will read from his latest book and selected poems. The award-winning Preston House Restaurant will provide a special early bird dinner prior to the event. Tel: 057 8731432.

Bookings for all Literary events can be made at the Dunamaisie Arts Centre Tel: 057 8663355. www.dunamaisie.ie and more information from the Arts Office, Laois County Council T: 057 8664033/13 E: artsoff@laoiscoco.ie W: www.laois.ie

The award winning Preston House Restaurant will provide an early bird dinner prior to the event on Saturday 9th November - contact Preston House on 057 8731432. **M**

NEW SCRIPT FESTIVAL FOCUSING ON WRITING FOR THE STAGE EMERGES IN OFFALY

"A barbeque or two Eat, drink, and sleep new works Workshops we have a few, guaranteed no writers hurt! Dazzling premieres, the lucky 7 star, Playwrights of whom by then, will have been mentored and had a jar; A festival which will be festive on each of its 7 days, and when it's time to be rested; We will have 7 new Irish plays."

For seven days in September the picturesque heritage town of Birr, county Offaly, a haven of Georgian elegance, will play host to an ensemble of playwrights, producers, actors and directors, all working towards one goal - to produce seven outstanding new Irish plays in seven fun-filled days! This innovative new playwriting festival called Scripts Ireland is co-produced by Birr Theatre & Arts Centre and Jasango Theatre and is supported by Offaly County Council and Offaly Local Development Company.

A touring theatre company, Jasango Theatre observed in recent years the difficulty emerging in producing new plays. With recessionary times impacting on the Arts more than other sectors, producers at Jasango observed a growing cautiousness amongst venues and audiences towards the production of new work.

Artistic Director, Angela Ryan Whyte noted: "With less money in everybody's pocket, the majority of people seemed more inclined to want to see tried and trusted work rather than experience something new or different. While this was a general trend, we were aware that there was still an appetite for new work amongst our existing audience database as well as a host of playwrights writing and wanting their work produced."

The response was to create a dedicated playwriting festival - a forum where new work could be developed, produced and celebrated and playwrights, actors, directors and producers could workshop exciting new work reflective of ever-changing times. Birr Theatre

& Arts Centre and Jasango Theatre have had a happy history of creating new works for the stage. Having hosted Jasango's first two national tours, producers went on to collaborate on Bo Leitchreach Green Play Festival in 2011 where they co-produced with Selkie Theatre, USA, an Irish version of Selkie's festival of green-themed plays Electric Cow.

In 2012, Birr Theatre & Jasango Theatre commissioned playwright Siobhan Donnellan to write an environmental play which received an enthusiastic response from audiences when premiered last September. Early in 2012, plans to create a dedicated national playwriting festival began resulting in the establishment of *Scripts-Ireland's Playwriting Festival* which runs at Birr Theatre & Arts Centre from September 8 to 14. Central to the establishment of *Scripts* has been the involvement of Playwright Eugene O'Brien, who has had a key role in shaping the developmental process of the festival.

The festival sets an annual theme around which writers can develop a short play of up to 15 Minutes in length. This year saw entries being submitted from every corner of Ireland, UK and America from both first-time and experienced playwrights on the theme Home. The reading panel selected four plays to be work shopped, rehearsed and performed as part of the festival. The four selected playwrights are mentored by Eugene throughout the festival week and have the opportunity to adapt and hone their scripts having seen them read by professional actors.

Directors and actors, together with playwrights and mentoring playwright, then work over the seven day period to perfect and polish each script which are all performed on the final night of the festival. All plays are judged on the final night and one is selected as Best Play. The festival also produces three other plays over the course of the week - a play for every day of the week!

PLAYS POPPING UP IN BIRR

Audiences in Birr can look forward to *Pop Up*

Plays which will appear in unconventional performance spaces throughout the festival week. The Pop Up Plays will be the product of another high-tempo competition-the 'write a play in a day challenge' where playwrights register to put their writing skills to the test under the shadow of the ticking clock, having just 24 hours to complete a five-minute play. Actors and directors have a further 24 hours to rehearse, memorise and stage these pop up plays-not for the faint hearted, but guaranteed to create rivers of adrenaline running through the streets of Birr!

RADIO PLAY

The seventh play is a radio play, where the winning play of the Wild For The Wireless competition will be broadcast as part of the festival. This selected play is professionally rehearsed, directed, produced and recorded and goes on to represent the festival through the medium of radio drama, thereafter.

WORKSHOPS

Lovers of theatre can also look forward to writing workshops for adults and young people which are being led by the finest of Irish writing talent. With the cream of contemporary Irish creative talent at the helm, Midlands based theatre artists have a unique opportunity to work with the likes of Eugene and Phillip McMahon, and take part in a national playwriting event right in the heart of Ireland.

TO FIND OUT MORE

To view the full programme of events, find out how to book tickets or workshops and learn more about the team of artists at work on Ireland's newest playwriting festival visit www.scriptsireland.com The Scripts team advise that workshops have limited availability and early booking is advised to guarantee a slot! Contact Scripts at scriptsireland@gmail.com Tel: 057 9122893 or + 353 86 3638758 Follow Scripts on Facebook at www.facebook.com/scripts and learn more about producing partners at www.jasangotheatre.org and www.birrtheatre.com **M**

REMEMBERING VINNY BAKER

The Midlands Arts and Culture Magazine pays tribute to Westmeath musician

Vinny was widely known throughout the music, entertainment and arts industry as a man who could literally play any instrument and was without doubt one of Ireland's most loved guitar players. But, he always had time and a kind word for others aiming to break through and throughout his career was a great help to so many young and up-and-coming bands and acts.

Vinny played in numerous bands with varying musical influences down the years from show bands to bluegrass,

including Bending The Strings, The Tennessee Breakdown Band, Hard Station and Cabin Fever - to name just a few.

Vinny who ran Vee Bee Recording studios at his home in The Downs, close to Mullingar in County Westmeath, just two weeks before his passing launched his CD *Vinny Baker and Friends To The Max* in The Greville Arms Hotel.

As it transpired, the occasion was to be a very special and memorable night for one

and all, as so many of Vinny's friends had gathered together, not knowing that it would be their last musical session with their friend and musical legend.

Friends of Vinny believe: "You may have left this world but there is no doubt, you are making magical music in the next! As a token of your talent and work, it is true to say the musical legacy that you left behind will play on forever more! You were a great friend, musician and all round good guy who will never be forgotten!" **M**



Vinny Baker, a musical legend who will never be forgotten

Movie Makers Bring Midlands BACK IN TIME

by Maria Daly

For most of us July was the month we eventually saw sunshine, but for some Midland residents it was the month Hollywood came to their village.

Film director Garret Daly brought a touch of magic to the towns of Tyrellspass in County Westmeath and Daingean, county Offaly when they were chosen as set locations for a new Irish film *A Nightingale Falling*.

Based on the book of the same name written by P.J. Curtis, this 1920's drama had heads turning across the Midlands as actors in period costumes as well as a large crew rolled into town to film.

The film tells a story of war-torn Ireland during the War of Independence concentrating on two women whose lives are overtaken and changed forever as they care for a wounded soldier who arrives on their doorstep.

What transpires is a tragic love story of a

household and its inhabitants, caught in the crucible of dark deep secrets.

The film was directed by Offaly man Garret Daly who, along with producer Martina McGlynn, have together created an impressive body of award-winning work already.

Working on a budget of €30,000, Garret decided to use his home village of Daingean for the majority of the shooting while Tyrellspass was also used for two days of filming.

"We were originally meant to film in Clare but we decided to change to Offaly and film in Daingean, which used to be known as Philipstown," explained Garret.

Although Daingean contained most of the set requirements for the film, production travelled the short distance to Tyrellspass as the main village backdrop. "The crescent was used a lot, and the old school house was used as the doctor's house," added Garret.

"The locals both in Tyrellspass and Daingean were a great help. Tyrellspass

GAA club let us use their club house as base and the Tidy Towns committee were very helpful with putting me in touch with the right people."

The people of Daingean were, of course, a little more used to seeing Garret and his crew around. Locals didn't seem phased by road closures or the presence of the film crew. And although professional actors were used for major roles, a lot of extras came from the Midlands.

"People were great, we got some 1920's costumes, a threshing machine, props, and even some vintage cars came from Mullingar," he added.

Film extras from across Westmeath and the Midlands along with an array of props, not forgetting backdrops and film locations – made this a very local production.

A Nightingale Falling should be ready for release in 2014, when viewers will get a chance to see the Midlands in all its glory thanks to this independent production. **M**

THE CAST IS AS FOLLOWS:

Tara Breathnach
May Collingwood

Muireann Bird
Tilly Collingwood

Gerard McCarthy
Captain James Shearing

Elliot Moriarty
Jackie Nolan

Brian Fortune
Tom Nolan

Andy Kellegher
Black & Tan Captain

Rose Henderson
Sally Johnson

Michael Ford
Dr Devlin

Blathnaid Ryan
Jeannie Devlin

Mark Tankersley
Re.Johnson

Maura Clancy
Mrs Brady, The Shopkeeper

Johnnie Brady
Mr Brady, The Publican

Pat McEvoy
The Postman

Martin McCourtney
Paul

Paul Keating
Paddy

Michael O'Rourke
Michael

The Naked Truth of the Painted Word

by Patrick Conboy

One county Longford poet is preparing to take the leap and reveal her work to the public for the first time as part of a unique artistic collaboration with her daughter.

The Naked Truth Series will open at the Backstage Theatre's Atrium Gallery on Thursday, November 7 – an exhibition consisting of Body Image paintings by Lorraine Masters with her mother, Valerie, contributing poetry which will be incorporated into the artwork.

"Lorraine has provided the inspiration for me with her paintings," Valerie admitted. "She completed her BA in Fine Art & Printing at the University of Limerick last year and as part of her graduate exhibition she featured a collection of Body Image works. She incorporated

mirrors with snippets of my poems and we decided we'd like to explore the idea further."

Her daughter, who at 22 years-old now runs her own studio in Limerick, subsequently received the Limerick Art Society Award for Excellence Shown, and her work has already come to the attention of art experts.

Describing their collaborative process, Valerie said: "Before she completes the paintings Lorraine passes them on to me and I'll draw inspiration from the images for my writing. I then hand them back to her and she finishes off the art by adding my words.

"If this exhibition is successful," she added "we hope to bring *The Naked Truth Series* to other galleries as well."

Valerie has been quietly working on her writing for almost 20 years but the only

people to witness her creative output until now have been the members of her local writing group and followers of her blog, valeriemasters.blogspot.com. "I've always written, but I really got serious about it in 1994 after my youngest child was born. Then I joined the Ballymahon Writers Group in 1998. The group really motivates me to write, and they're bluntly honest."

While she chiefly focuses on poetry, Valerie also writes short stories and she explains that she explores juxtaposing themes in each discipline: "My poetry is dark, dealing with topics such as death and depression.

"My short stories, on the other hand, tend to funny although it's difficult for me to pin them to a specific genre. I've written 22 stories so far and I'd like to see if I can publish them at some point."

M



Valerie Masters

Taking the Choral World by Storm



Edward Denniston

Longford poet publishes new collection

by Patrick Conboy

During the summer, Longford poet Edward Denniston published a new collection of poetry *The Scale of Things*.

Edward, a teacher of English and Drama, has lived and worked in Waterford with his wife and children since 1980. His family has historical links with the city, with one of his Presbyterian ancestors having lived and preached dissent in the area during the 18th century.

The collection, published by Salmon Poetry, was launched at Greyfriars Municipal Gallery in Waterford in July.

His other publications include *The Point of Singing*, an ebook entitled *Eskimo Advice* and *Interacting – 60 Drama Scripts*. **M**



Tullamore Academy Chamber Choir

The multi award winning Tullamore Academy Chamber Choir has an array of prestigious awards under its belt having scooped National Choir of the Year 2012 and topped the Navan and Kiltimagh Choral Festivals this year. The choir also secured a prestigious runner up place in the RTE Lyric FM Choirs for Christmas competition, which attracted 400 choirs nationally.

The Tullamore Academy Chamber Choir comprises 21 local choral scholars from The Tullamore Academy of Music and they have taken the choral world by storm with an innovative and eclectic collection of choral music, specially chosen for their competitive show-stopping nature.

As winners of the National Choir of the Year 2012 the choir were this year under pressure to present an even more prolific and challenging repertoire of choral music to maintain and achieve an even more advanced standard of choral excellence.

2013 was also the inauguration of a new competition on the Irish Choral scene called Irelands Choir of the Year, which was held at Cork International Choral Festival, now acknowledged as one of Europe's leading choral festivals. The competition was held in Cork City Hall with most leading Irish choirs competing including The Academy Chamber Choir. Adjudication came from a panel of five of the top international adjudicators from the US, Hungary, Finland, UK and Ireland. The Academy Chamber Choir won third place, giving them the official ranking of being the third best choir in Ireland.

With this achievement the choir performed at the Navan Choral Festival where they swept the boards winning the top spot at both the Early Music and the Irish Language competitions (performing a new work Siosuram So by leading Irish composer Michael McGlynn) and walking away with second prize in the Sacred Music competition.

Not surprisingly, the choir has been approached by several international choral communities requesting for them to compete abroad, which is under consideration for 2014.

ABOUT THE CHOIR

The Tullamore Academy Chamber Choir was founded in September 2007 and is

directed by Ciaran Brady who has an Honours MA in Music and Vocal Performance from NUI Maynooth. Further post-graduate studies brought him to Germany where he trained in Advanced Vocal Technique with Professor Markus Goritzky at the Hochschule für Musik in Freiburg.

Not surprisingly, the choir has been approached by several international choral communities requesting for them to compete abroad

Ciaran is Director of the Academy of Music in Tullamore and is also a full time professional Vocal Coach. Ciaran's Voice training started at the age of 10 as a boy treble and Head Chorister of the famous Palestrina Choir. Professionally he was a member of the RTE Chamber Choir and founder member of The National Chamber Choir. He also has extensive work as a soloist and recordings and has worked with companies such as National Opera, Opera Northern Ireland and Opera Ireland. Ciaran is also a prolific choral educator and conductor and is also Director and Conductor of Moate Youth Choir and was Director of the Maynooth University Chamber Choir.

Each choral scholar is a student of voice with The Academy and has a different and wide-ranging background in solo, operatic and competitive performance, which enhances the choir's ability to undertake some of the more challenging choral works and contributes to their fresh and unique sound. The Academy Chamber Choir's repertoire spans from early to contemporary music.

You can read more about the choir on www.theacademyofmusic.ie and if you would like to hear the choir perform, see them for free on Culture Night, September 20 at Birr Theatre and Arts Centre. **M**



Laois School of Music APPROVED FOR European Union Funding

Laois School of Music in conjunction with Tallaght Community Arts has been approved for funding under the European Union's Leonardo programme.

The Leonardo programme is part of an initiative by the EU to support Life Long Learning and is specifically targeted at the Vocational Educational and Training Sector and its relationship with the world of Work.

The title of the project is *Preparing for Success in Music* and Laois School of Music will be working with four other partners - Austria, Denmark, France and Turkey. The programme encourages organisations from around Europe to visit each others countries over a two year period and work together on delivering an agreed programme of work which will be of benefit in the future to the Vocational Sector.

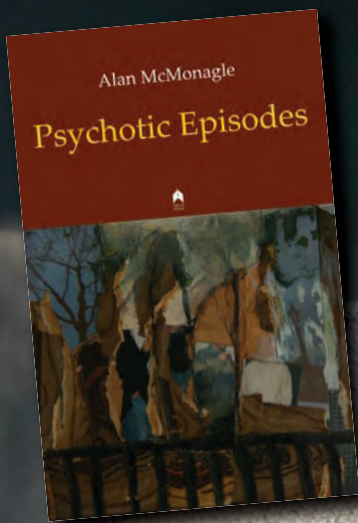
The proposed programme of work includes exploring both the music and the non-music skills which are necessary for a successful career in music. Music skills include proficiency on one's chosen instrument, ability to read music, vocal technique, etc. while non-music skills include personal management, familiarity with information technology, basic business and marketing skills.

Laois School of Music also intends to produce a self-coaching toolbox to enable musicians to determine their degree of proficiency in a range of skills /competencies. Depending on the outcome of the assessment there will be a suggested programme of work or direction towards helpful resources to make good any identified deficiencies.

HISTORY

The Laois School of Music opened in September 2001 based in Portlaoise and currently has 350 students, 16 part-time specialised music teachers, a full-time co-ordinator and more than 900 Primary School pupils availing of Music Outreach. In providing quality tuition in Piano, Guitar, Strings, Woodwind, Voice, Percussion, Kindermusic, Junior and Leaving Cert. music, the school has become a recognised centre of excellence for Laois and the surrounding counties. The LSM has also developed a Youth Orchestra with 34 members age 12 to 18 and a Junior Orchestra (Orpheus) with 22 members age seven to 12.

Tallaght Community Arts is a pro-active arts development organisation working with professional artists, local communities, schools and youth groups to activate arts programmes in line with the needs of the wider Tallaght community: geographically, culturally and socially.



Stefanie Brüning

GERMAN ARTIST returns for inspiration

Visiting German artist Stefanie Brüning has taken up a three-month residency at the Arthouse, Stradbally.

Stefanie trained as a sculptor and art teacher in the Academy of Fine Arts Munich and since then she has worked as a freelance artist and university lecturer for art.

"I pursue my professional career currently in Germany but since 2001 I maintain Ireland as my second place of residency. I enjoy a special connection with the country, where I lived and worked permanently from 2006-09 and draw my inspiration from the essence of its landscape and nature." She explained. "Space and the line form the basis for my artistic examination. Currently I am working mainly with paper, which I often fabricate myself. I like to manipulate it in colour, weight, surface and dimension etc."

Stefanie added that her technical approach to this material is the "cut". "By 'opening' the paper surface with a scalpel, space is created- literally as well as symbolically. The initial exploring of the sheets by pencil drawings is followed by cutting out the fragile lines and grids - thus drawing becomes tactile and fluctuates between being two - and three dimensional. In my paper cuts I am interested to reveal the skeleton, the intrinsic fabric of a place, reducing it sometimes to abstract laces or single cyphers."

Stefanie's first week at the Arthouse in early August was spent working on the Arts Office Summer Programme.

M

PSYCHOTIC EPISODES

Longford author Alan McMonagle launches book of short stories

by Patrick Conboy

Alan McMonagle has received widespread praise for his writing at home and abroad and the Longford writer has been recognised with a plethora of awards from the Professional Artists Retreat, the Fundacion Valparaiso, the Banff Centre for Creativity and the Arts Council of Ireland.

"I started to write when I was only about seven years-old," the author revealed. "One of the first stories I wrote was called *The Ants Who Grew Into GI-Ants* - I thought the title was so clever! But then I started secondary school and there was a 20-year gap before I started to write again."

His early enthusiasm may have been tempered by an overwhelming desire to break out into the world beyond Longford. "I couldn't wait to get out of Longford as a teenager...I felt very claustrophobic here."

But, Alan has grown to love his hometown again and these days even drawing inspiration from it: "After all that time I still had all these places, streets and alleys and lanes, and people's names - nicknames in particular - which is why a lot of my stories have been inspired by Longford; early memories, which is why a lot of the stories, also have a youthful voice to them."

Alan's latest tome, a book of short stories called *Psychotic Episodes* was launched in May. It's a collection full of humour and anxiousness, with the characters grappling for their place in the scheme of things. Portions of it may already be familiar to some readers, especially the title story, which was nominated for the Pushcart Prize in 2011.

"It's a rush, it's really why you put your head on a plate," he commented on awards nominations. "It's lovely, too, especially if you have one of your peers - one of your heroes - on the adjudicating panel."

On his stories, he revealed: "You get so many ideas, and if you can just coalesce one into a story, that's one idea dealt with and you can move onto the next one. It's so satisfying to begin something and then to finally nudge it over the finish line. Then there's the inevitable muddle which takes it from the beginning to the end. I think it was the brilliant British poet Philip Larkin who said 'every good short story has a beginning, a muddle, and an end', so I find myself muddling quite a lot of the time! But that's what I enjoy."

His work isn't limited to the short story format either. "I've had a couple of forays into a novel which is still resting in my drawer somewhere. I dabble in poetry, I dabble in radio plays - I still love writing drama - and this is all fallout in the best possible way from the MA in Writing I completed at NUI Galway in 2007. That gave me a foothold to tackle all these different genres. The short stories are what I will always return to, though."

M

2013 Arthouse Studio Awards

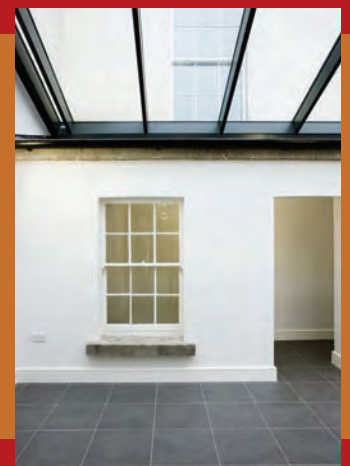
Laois County Council has announced the **2013 Arthouse Studio Awards** for Professional Artists at the Arthouse, Stradbally. The awards are intended to support emerging artists/designers to develop their professional practice whilst engaging in a residency project and community context.

Awards: €2,500 (3 months) €5000 (6 months) €7,500 (9 months)

Facilities include: A studio with accommodation at a rent of €200 per month or a studio without accommodation for €120 per month. The Arthouse complex includes an exhibition space, rehearsal space, kiln, garden space, a digital room, and library facilities.

Also available is a professional artist's studio with or without accommodation at the Arthouse, Stradbally.

For further information and application forms contact the Arts Office, Laois County Council, Áras an Chontae, Portlaoise, Co Laois
Tel: 057 8664033 / 13
E:mail artsoff@laoiscoco.ie
Web: www.laois.ie M





And That's a Wrap!

FilmOffaly reports a bumper year of filming across the county

FilmOffaly: Sophie Scully in *Men And Women*

In 2013 FilmOffaly, Offaly's Film Commission marks its 5th birthday and it is celebrating its phenomenal successes with a new look website (www.filmoffaly.ie)

Blockbuster film stars such as Brendan Gleeson (*Noreen*) and Anne Hathaway (*Becoming Jane*) have filmed here. FilmOffaly funded short films have won at the Galway Film Fleadh (*Toy Soldiers* 2012, *Noreen* 2010) and the Belfast Film Festival (*Toy Soldiers* 2013). And, Rebecca Daly's acclaimed debut *The Other Side of Sleep* brought attention on Offaly as a location, as it screened internationally at Cannes, Toronto and Berlin before its IFTA nomination and general release in Ireland. Other acclaimed Irish feature films such as *His and Hers* and *Garage* also brought national attention on Offaly as a location primed for the film industry.

"Film activity is always brewing in Offaly", says Arts Officer Sinéad O'Reilly, "and 2013 has been amazing so far, and we are only half way through the year!"

In March, US drama pilot, *Reign* (about Mary Queen of Scots) wrapped up in Charleville Castle, Tullamore, as did the short film *Men & Women* (winner of the FilmOffaly Filmbase Award 2012) which was shot in Cloghan and Croghan in March, and selected for screening at the Galway Film Fleadh.

Documentary film *There's Something about Shinrone* by Steven Goldsmith was made in Shinrone and feature sci-fi *The Participants* by Still Films was on location in Boora in August.

Also on location over the summer was *A Nightingale Falling which is* feature film adaptation of PJ Curtis' novel by Mixed Bag Media which was filmed in Daingean. The illustrious cast included Tara Breathnach

(*The Tudors, Last Days of Anne Boleyn*), Muireann Bird and Gerard McCarthy (BBC's *The Fall*)

Shooting on the peatlands in September is *Our Unfenced Country*, by Swansong Films, winner of the Galway Film Centre/RTE Award 2013. And during the same month, in Kinnitty and the Slieve Bloom Mountains is *Hunter Gatherer*, written by Nick Wilkinson and directed by Diarmuid Goggins - winner of the FilmOffaly/Filmbase Award 2013. There was even an international commercial for *Buchanan Master Blend Scotch Whiskey* shot at Leap Castle recently!

But the films just keep rolling in the county with numerous productions in the pipeline, including a film in Rhode entitled *Reawakening*, Paddy Slattery's *The Pilgrims Coat*, the RTÉ series *Tracks and Trails* and a TG4/Tile Films production about sacred sites in Ireland.

Clr Nichola Hogan, Chairperson of FilmOffaly remarked on recent Offaly film success on RTE: "The documentary *A Grand Experience* reaching an audience of 565,000 last October was amazing and we are equally proud of two FilmOffaly Board members Ann Marie Kelly and Gary Hoctor who made the documentary *Wally*, which also recently screened on RTÉ.

"Having filmmakers on our board has always been so important as they know the needs and trends of the industry better than anyone. It is important that we are recognised by the film industry as being supportive of their needs, that we are not

purely interested in film as an economic driver, though that is something that we measure carefully too."

FILM AND ARTS CAN DRIVE REVENUES TO LOCAL ECONOMY
Film can bring big business to an area, with production companies using hotels, catering, taxi, and restaurants. For example, the recent US TV pilot in Charleville Castle saw 130 cast and crew come to Tullamore for six days.

"Way back when *Pure Mule* was shot in Banagher for RTÉ, we knew that it was worth around a €1m to the local economy," explained Sinead. Getting that baseline data for spend from production companies can be elusive, but it's very convincing information to have." To that end FilmOffaly are currently developing a vendor card in collaboration with businesses in Offaly, which will be yet another way to support productions on location in Offaly.

BOARD MEMBERS
The Board of FilmOffaly currently consists of: Clr Nichola Hogan (2012- Chairperson); Clr Molly Buckley (Chairperson 2010-2012); Marcella Corcoran Kennedy, TD (Chairperson 2008-2009); Sinead O'Reilly (Arts Officer); Gary Hoctor (Hello Camera, Director of OFFline Film Festival); Clr Sinead Dooley; Paddy Slattery (Stand Mantra Films); Ann Marie Kelly (broadcaster and documentary maker) and Vivienne Clarke (journalist)

For more information see www.filmoffaly.ie or follow FilmOffaly on Facebook and Twitter.

Briefs

Packed Programme of Fun, Music and Entertainment AT MULLINGAR ARTS CENTRE

Fans of theatre and music are going to be spoilt for choice at the Mullingar Arts Centre over the coming months with shows of all kinds are on offer. So, whether you like having *Stones In Your Pockets*, you like to live in your own *Eden*, or you like to rock out to your favourite *Queen* songs Mullingar Arts Centre will keep you entertained right up and beyond the New Year.

Upcoming events include:

September 17 – 21
Whistle Down The Wind
Andrew Lloyd Webber's hit musical comes to Mullingar.

September 27 – 28
Tuesdays with Morrie
A heart-warming exploration of friendship and life.

October 4
Flash Harry – The Music of Queen Stages a comeback in Mullingar Arts Centre this October for one night only to recreate the timeless magic of Queen.



October 5
Eden
Eugene O'Brien's play is brought to life by Decadent Theatre.

October 19 – 21
Othello: Moor of Venice
Presented by Icarus Theatre Collective and Kings Theatre, Southsea.

November 2
Stones in His Pockets
Marie Jones's hilarious comedy is not to be missed

November 14 – 16
Cavalcadars
Billy Roche's wonderful play is the NOMAD 2013 production.

November 27
The Caucasian Chalk Circle
From Bruiser Theatre Company presents this Bertolt Brecht offering, translated by Alistair Beaton and directed by Lisa May

December 10
Vladimir
Vladimir's debut performance at Mullingar Arts Centre



CONTACT
www.mullingarartscentre.ie
044 9347777

Athlone Literary Festival WRITE IT INTO YOUR DIARY

Athlone Literary Festival's 2013 weekend programme is bursting at the seams with events that include interviews with Ireland's premier writers like Pat McCabe, Vona Groarke, interactive workshops including Creative Writing with author James Lawless and lots more.

Events will range from discussions on How-To-Get-Published and children's events like our Monster Doodle, where children help complete a Giant Poster with a published illustrator of children's books. The festival takes place from October 4 to 6 in the Shamrock Lodge Hotel and other venues around Athlone.

For more details on our festival please visit Web: www.athloneliteraryfestival.com
Email: literaryathlone@gmail.com Tel: 086 367 1039 You can also find the festival on www.facebook.com/athloneliteraryfestival and on www.twitter.com/athloneliterary



Patrick McCabe is one of the writers who will take part in the upcoming Athlone Literary Festival.





Terry Byrne as Morrie

Tuesdays with Morrie

Following the phenomenally successful run at the Gaiety last year, Birr Theatre & Arts Centre is to host Tuesdays with Morrie a stage adaptation of the international best-selling novel by Mitch Albom with Performances in the Mullingar Arts Centre.

“This is a play that might – incredibly, just might – change your life.”

John Simon, *New York Magazine*

“Unforgettable! No matter how well you tell the story, the play makes it more vivid, more shattering, more humorous.”

New York Magazine

“A touching, life-affirming, deeply emotional drama with a generous dose of humor.”

New York Daily News

Tuesdays with Morrie, written for the stage by Mitch Albom and Jeffrey Hatcher, is the autobiographical story of Mitch Albom, an accomplished journalist driven solely by his career, and Morrie Schwartz, his former college professor.

Some 16 years after graduation, Mitch happens to catch Morrie’s appearance on a television news program and learns that his old professor is battling illness. Mitch is reunited with Morrie, and what starts as a simple visit turns into a weekly pilgrimage and a last class in the meaning of life.

Little did Morrie Schwartz realise during his lifetime that his wisdom would touch millions; a book, a movie and then a play and their cumulative impact on readers, movie lovers and theatre goers certainly proves the adage that one good teacher’s influence on just one good student can affect positively on the lives of many.”

Mitch was a student of Professor Schwartz at Brandeis University in Massachusetts in the late seventies who went on to be an extremely successful sports journalist who covered coveted calendar highlights such as the Olympics and the Super Bowl.

His life was frantic – planes, trains, copy deadlines and TV shows. Then one night, 16 years after he had last seen his old Professor, he saw an elderly and unwell

Morrie on TV propelling Mitch into action and take a flight from Detroit to Boston to see his old friend. It was a Tuesday, the day of the week their lectures had been held at university. One visit led to 14 consecutive Tuesdays where Mitch flew down to Massachusetts at considerable professional sacrifice to spend time with his old friend.

Out of this true story, Mitch wrote the book which became a bestseller and then became a film with Jack Lemmon. Mitch then collaborated with Jeffrey Hatcher to write the play, which Breda Cashe is now touring in Ireland.

Director Breda Cashe captures every essence of this beautifully written play down to the minutiae. As Morrie Schwartz and Mitch Albom respectively, Terry Byrne and Andrew Murray deserve the highest praise for their performances in what could have been a difficult two hander to pull off. As each character navigates to his destination, both actors carried them off with deliberate and perfect pace.

When Mitch first introduces Morrie on a minimalist stage set of high bookshelves and two chairs (set design by Jack Kirwan), there is an immediate warm connection with the audience. You like them both; Byrne playfully dancing the tango displays an utter lack of ego and Murray responds with an expression of

smiling pride in his old mentor. As one Tuesday leads to the next, Byrne as Morrie enraptures and Murray as Mitch allows him to do so. The pair have the most workable chemistry and because of this the story flows and becomes utterly engaging.

Byrne steals the show as the clever, humorous, no nonsense Morrie who imparts his own and WH Auden’s wisdoms as if indeed they were his own: “We must love one another or die.” He is completely convincing as the wise old man whose bedside you would buy tickets for if they were on sale. Murray’s strength is to play the bedside visitor as the questioning enthralled student, while allowing the old man centre stage.

It may reveal no fresh insights but it is one of those Everyman, Everywoman plays that comes along only once in a while to give us a break from the tragedies we identify with only because human nature is rarely this wise. It stirs the emotional cauldron to bring to the surface life’s compass towards human fulfillment.”

Tuesdays with Morrie is on at Birr Theatre & Arts Centre Saturday, September, 21st at 8pm. Contact the Box Office on Tel: 057 9122911 or buy tickets online at www.birrtheatre.com

Also on in Mullingar Arts Centre on 27th and 28th September. **M**



Paul Roy and Clea Van Der Grijn discover Green is Pink

Green is Pink is a collaborative exploration and conversation on the nature of loss between artists Cléa Van Der Grijn and Westmeath artist Paul Roy.

Green is Pink is the beginning of the artist’s conversation on the nature of loss, viewed from difference perspectives. *Green is Pink* features at The Model, Sligo during the month of September.

See www.cleavandergrijn.com and www.paulroy.eu for more on the artists.

See next issue for article from Paul Roy on the project. **M**

Culture Night in Laois

Explore, Experience, Enjoy



Culture Night makes a return to Laois on Friday, September 20. A great selection of events are scheduled for all around the county with the highlight being a drama premier of *From the Sod to the Sky* in the Dunamais Arts Theatre starting at 8pm.

What makes this play extra special is the fact it has been specially commissioned based on the writings of James Fintan Lalor and starring Paul Meade and Myles Dungan as part of the James Fintan Lalor Inaurural School.

But, if that doesn't tickle your fancy, other events in Portlaoise include a Drop in Art workshop in the Dunamais, an adult drumming circle in County Hall, a dance and music event with the 50+ active age group and a Literary and music event with Laois Writers Group.

On top of that, Abbeyleix is featuring a Music and Heritage talk while Portarlinton will hold a drama open evening and a poetry reading and heritage talk. In Rathdowney artists will hold a drop in art workshop for all ages and Mountmellick Library will be the venue for a cultural evening.

Rural communities such as Arles, Vicarstown, Fisherstown, and Tolerton will also host an array of events including: exhibitions, drama and music, with something for everybody.

A brochure listing all events happening in Laois is available from the Laois Arts Office and from Libraries throughout the county.

For more information contact: The Arts Office, Laois County Council, Áras an Chontae, Portlaoise, County Laois
Tel: 057 8664033/13 • Email: artsoff@laoiscoco.ie
Web: www.laois.ie



Tinnakill House



James Fintan Lalor Stamp



LET LAWS AND INSTITUTIONS SAY WHAT THEY WILL, THIS FACT WILL BE PROMPTER THAN ALL LAWS, AND PREVAIL AGAINST THEM - THE FACT THOSE WHO OWN YOUR LAND WILL MAKE YOUR LAWS, AND COME

JAMES FINTAN LALOR

New school launched in honor of James Fintan Lalor

The opening of the Inaugural James Fintan Lalor school will take place on Culture Night, September 20 in the Dunamais Arts Centre in Portlaoise.

The school will bring together national and local writers, journalists, broadcasters, academics, politicians, artists and Laois people to discuss, debate and celebrate the ideas of Lalor and their relevance to the Ireland of today and tomorrow.

The opening night will include a staging of a specially commissioned play, entitled *From the Sod to the Sky*, by playwright and screenwriter, Mike Finn, based on the writings of James Fintan Lalor. In this two hander production, RTE Broadcaster Myles Dungan will be in conversation with James Fintan Lalor, the historical figure being played by actor Paul Meade.

The following day, panellists including Diarmuid Ferriter, Myles Dungan, Ruth Dudley Edwards, John Drennan and Clare O'Brien will debate the themes, *A Country in Crisis, Politics and the Press* and *A Vision of Ireland*.

The James Fintan Lalor Inaugural School is set to be a major event in the cultural calendar of Laois, bringing together a variety of parties with an interest in Irish history, heritage, politics and current affairs, and welcoming home members of our diaspora to debate the future of Ireland in the year of the Gathering.

This School will be a fitting tribute to him, a significant Laois-born national figure who engaged directly with the political climate of his time, fighting for land rights on behalf of the oppressed Irish farming community and the working classes.

Mr Lalor, who died in 1849 lives on in memory as a man of passion and integrity dedicating his short life to advocacy on behalf of those who were too weak and downtrodden to speak for themselves. His writings influenced John Mitchell, Michael Davitt, James Larkin, Padraig Pearse and James Connolly. For more on the life, writings and influence of James Fintan Lalor see www.jamesfintanlalor.ie

The event is being organised in partnership by a group comprising representatives of Laois County Council and Laois Heritage Society. The Summer School will be a follow-on to the commemorative monument commemorating his life, officially unveiled by former Taoiseach, Brian Cowen, in December, 2007. This beautiful bronze sculpture, designed and crafted by Mayo-based artist Rory Breslin, stands outside the Council Chambers, facing James Fintan Lalor Avenue, Portlaoise's main thoroughfare. On the limestone base on which he stands are his immortal words "*Ireland her own, and all therein, from the sod to the sky. The soil of Ireland for the people of Ireland*".



Culture Night in Offaly



Culture Night in Offaly has really taken off in 2103 with 15 FREE cultural events happening all over the county on Friday, September 20.

This year venues such as Daingean Courthouse, Clonony castle, Ballybrittan Castle, Leap Castle, Belmont and Fancroft Mills have been added to the programme along as some pop up culture happening in places not advertised – just for a little surprise for the public! But, while events are free it is worth noting that most events have a booking requirement.



BIRR THEATRE AND ARTS CENTRE
8pm
The multi award winning **Tullamore Academy Chamber Choir**, winners of the National Choir of the Year 2012, with an innovative and eclectic collection of choral music, specially chosen for their competitive show-stopping nature; alongside the **Kerman Dance Company** from France.
Booking Essential. Tel: 057 9122911

BRIDGE CENTRE, TULLAMORE
4pm to 6pm - **Art to the People**
An eclectic mix of dance, music and poetry from **Man I Pulate**, **Miles O'Bog Ensemble** featuring **Kate Flynn** and the **Tullamore Gospel Choir** brings Culture Night to shoppers as a platform for professional music and dance based in County Offaly.

TULLAMORE LIBRARY
Storytelling and Songs from **Pat Speight** (one of Ireland's best known storytellers) **Dolores Keaveny** (author and storyteller from Westmeath) **Noel O'Farrell**

EDENDERRY LIBRARY
Guitarist and singer **Aimee Molloy** alongside poetry recitals by the **Acorn Writers** group and **St Mary's Secondary School** pupils and open mic.

PUBLIC ACCESS ARTS, EDENDERRY
7pm to late
The biggest band in the smallest venue in Ireland, **MOR** 40 professional musicians in a collaborative live lounge music festival for a mini rotating audiences of 4! Loiterers welcome outside to enjoy the music through the window!

TULLAMORE DEW VISITORS CENTRE
8.30pm
Broken Bottle Theatre Company presents extracts from Jimmy Murphy's award winning play **Brothers of the Brush**, featuring **Attracta Brady** (fiddle/flute) and **John O'Connell** (guitar)

CANAL QUARTER MUSIC AT KILBRIDE PARK, TULLAMORE
7.30pm
Tullamore Town Band with **Diarmuid Guinan** on the site of the new arts centre hear big band swing sound!

SCULPTURE IN THE PARKLANDS
5pm to 6.30pm - Hedge School workshop
Family workshop with artists Tom Meskell and Jean Conroy on how to make sculptures and temporary landscape interventions. **Booking limited to 20 people. Tel: 057 9357400**

BELMONT MILL
6.30pm - National Gallery Talk and tour of the Mill
The National Gallery talk encompasses the finest works on paper and concludes with Ireland's favourite painting **Meeting on the Turret Stairs**. **Maximum numbers are 22. Tel: 057 9357400**

LEAP CASTLE
8pm to 9.30pm
Trad Night of Irish music and dance.

CLONONY CASTLE, CROGHAN
8pm to 9.30pm
The Lyric String Quartet featuring ballet performances.
Booking essential. Tel: 057 93 57400.

BALLYBRITTAN CASTLE, EDENDERRY
8pm to 9.30pm
Dearbhaile O'Donnell on piano with a programme of 18th Century Music.
Booking essential Tel: 057 93 57400.

FANCROFT MILL
8pm
Talented Trio of Trad Padraic Keane (award winning uilleann piper from Galway) Sean Hughes (Tullamore fiddle and flute) and Ruairi McGorman (fiddle and bouzouki county Meath)
Booking essential. Tel: 050 531484 or e-mail millgardens@gmail.com

DAINGEAN TOWN HALL
8pm to 9pm
Jacek Lomejko and friends play an eclectic mix of French and Polish Music and a short historical account of the restored Daingean Courthouse by John Kearney.

POP UP POETRY, TULLAMORE
4pm to 6pm
Richard Brennan and the Tullamore Rhymers in a random coffee shop in Tullamore



Yarn Bombing Takes to the Streets of Mullingar

Claire Delabre of Handmade Design Studio tells of the fun woolen plans in place as part of Culture Night in Westmeath.

For Culture Night this year, Mullingar is going to be yarn bombed with the help of the knitters and crocheters in the Midlands and beyond. There is no doubt Christo and Jeanne Claude would be well impressed with the plans that are in place for September 20 as this group of creative wool enthusiasts takes to the streets in style.

The idea behind the Mullingar Yarn Bombing group is to bring the yarn crafters community together, share an art project with the wider community, meet people and have fun. The revival in

knitting and crocheting in the past couple of years is really inspiring and great to see. These are skills that have been around for generations. Handed down from grannies, mummies and aunties learning to knit is part of many girls and boys personal and emotional heritage.

This is why Claire Delabre, has chosen the title for the Mullingar Yarn Bombing art project to be *As You Are Now So Once Were We*. The title also hints at the revival of the trend for craft and creativity that harks back to the values of an earlier era. This yarn bombing project is Claire's way

of linking past and present ideas of heritage together.

As Claire explained: "Yarn bombing or urban knitting, for anyone not familiar with the practice, is a type of graffiti or street art that uses colourful displays of knitted or crocheted work pieced together to cover buildings, statues, pavements or trees. Yarn installations are fun, decorative, non-permanent forms of graffiti that are meant to bring some colour into sometimes dull public spaces. Reclaiming a space in the community and personalising it creates

a sense of belonging and highlights features that can sometimes go unnoticed.

"Knitting and crocheting together as a group also means that we can share our knowledge and learn from each other, meet new people and have some fun - using yarns and telling them at the same time!"

Watch the streets of Mullingar on Culture Night as this unique and fun group takes its colourful and creative yarn art all across the town. **M**



A beautiful piece of yarn bombing giving the country a new colourful look





Isolation



Perpetual

Artist Pat Byrne shares his experiences of **the Nes Artist Residency**

In October 2011 I applied for a three month residency with Nes Artist Residency in Skagastrond, Iceland - a small fishing town in North-East Iceland, three hours from Reykjavik.

I think for all of us new to the town it had a surreal feeling to it, partially due to the 24 hours of daylight and also how isolated the town was as there was no regular bus service.

I arrived at the start of June with 11 other artists, mostly from the US, and almost straight away set about exploring the surrounding area.

The week we arrived was a very busy time in Skagastrond because everyone was preparing for the weeklong Fisherman's Festival.

Throughout June I spent a lot of time experimenting in the studio and exploring the surrounding mountains and countryside and, of course, the 24 hour daylight meant you didn't have to worry about getting lost in the dark because the sun never even reached the horizon!

June was a busy month because as well as the festival we had the Open Studio where we welcomed a lot of visitors in to see our work and we also had a visit from the American Ambassador, Luis E. Arreaga. Then, towards the end of the month six of us climbed to the top of Spakonufell, the mountain overlooking the town for the Summer Solstice.

July saw the first batch of artists leave and a new wave start their residency. July seemed like a calmer month because the only event was the month's Open Studio and July also saw my work pick up momentum and take shape. At this point on the residency I had seen almost all the surrounding area and I was spending between 10 and 12 hours in the studio aside for a visit to the neighbouring town Saudarkrokur.

August again ushered in new artists and the final month of my stay and it felt, once again, like there was a constant buzz around the town. My time was rapidly counting down at this point and I was trying to reach my goal of starting five pieces before I left.

The KantryBaer Festival was at the end of the month and again there were big

preparations. Our input into the festival was an entire weekend of Open Studios, meeting people and telling them about our work. And, I did manage in the end to overshoot my target number of works by 1 extra painting.

The residency was of huge benefit to me. I returned to Ireland feeling more confident in my work and with new ideas too in different media. I also met with directors from other residencies based in Iceland, Norway and Latvia and I met some really nice people which I have kept in contact with.

Painting themes
The core theme of my painting is playing with scale. This is achieved by placing locations, landscapes and scenes in, on or around oversized everyday objects creating juxtapositions that give my work a surrealist nature. I tend to arrive at this point through the use of sketches, collages and photography, experimenting with images to find what works well together.

As well as the visual element this recent body of work has underlying layers that look at issues and occurrences of our

surrounding environments and areas either historical or as a result of progress, both natural and through the impact of human activity.

The goal of working this way is primarily to simply have fun with the imagery while the secondary aim is to subtly portray the tones that run beneath the aesthetic. **M**

- The Arthouse Gallery, Stradbally, county Laois opened Pat Byrne's latest exhibition *Excursion*. The work includes new pieces from a three month residency with Nes Artist Residency in Skagastrond, Iceland.
- *Excursion* runs until October 4 and the artist will give a presentation and talk at the Arthouse and Library, Stradbally, on Friday, September 20 at 7pm as part of the county's Culture Night celebration. All are welcome and refreshments will be served.
- Opening hours: Tuesday – Friday: 1pm – 4pm; Saturday: Please contact Vernon McNicolos on Tel: 057 864 1740 for further information.

Singing her way to success

For some time now Maria Matthews has been wowing judges and audiences at Feis Ceoil competitions with her exceptional singing talent. She was even awarded a bursary to further her development as a classical vocalist after she clinched first place at the Sligo Feis Ceoil earlier this year.

"I took part in three competitions and they found the winner of the bursary by adding up each contestant's total scores from each competition and finding the average," explained Maria who hails from Moyne in County Longford. "This year I did an oratorio, or sacred solo, which is basically a religious song. I sang *How*

Beautiful are the Feet from Handel's *Messiah*. I also performed a solo from a musical, *I Dreamed A Dream*, from *Les Misérables* and then I did the vocal solo where I had to sing two contrasting pieces, so I did another piece by Handel called *Lascia ch'io Pianga* from the opera *Rinaldo*."

Maria also received recognition from the judges at the Dublin competition where she found herself up against vocalists from across the globe.

"People come from Germany, America, and other countries all over the world for the Dublin Feis Ceoil," she explains. "I only entered one competition there this year because I was studying for my Leaving Cert, and there would have been a lot of pressure if I had done any more.

"I entered the Vocal Solo Under-18

section, where everyone has to sing the same piece of music first, and then the judges call back the finalists based on those performances and they get to sing a second piece of music. There were 22 in the competition, and only seven got a callback, and I was one of those. I didn't finish first or second, but I received a commendation."

The young soprano has been training as a vocalist since her primary school days. "I've been having lessons with Derek Mahady in Rooskey since I was 10 years-old. And, I also train with Edith Forrest, who is a lecturer in DIT. Edith was actually Derek's vocal coach when he was in the college, and he recommended me to her and arranged an audition."

With her first year of college on the horizon, it comes as no surprise that she wants her studies to focus on music. But,

she has a choice to make after being accepted by DIT, Maynooth and Trinity after auditioning at all three colleges. "The place I really want to go to is DIT," Maria confessed. "I'd love to do performance or vocal coaching. The course in DIT is very broad and you can branch into many different areas. I don't have to make a decision until my third year, so I still have time to think about it."

M

Maria Matthews



Young Longford pianist has keys to success

by Patrick Conboy

Peter Regan

The great composer Robert Shumann once said “play always as if in the presence of a master”. That remains sound advice for any musician and it’s the way one young pianist from Lanesborough in county Longford is approaching his craft.

Peter Regan has been playing the piano since the age of eight and the Leaving Cert student has remained dedicated to

his studies ever since, as his rigorous training schedule attests.

“I practice for several hours each day,” Peter said of his regimen. “I also had to give up playing the violin so I could focus on the piano. I had to choose between both instruments and it was a tough decision because I love both. In the end I chose piano because I have been playing it for longer, and also because I prefer the fullness of sound you can achieve with it. With the violin you can only play one line at a time.”

His musical vocation has even influenced his choice of school: “I was attending St Finian’s College in Mullingar but transferred to Wesley College in Dublin after doing my Junior

Cert. I wanted to do Transition Year so I could have time to focus on my music for a while...Wesley is a school with a great tradition in music and has fantastic facilities.”

Overseeing Peter’s tuition nowadays is John O’Conor, the Professor of Piano at the Royal Irish Academy of Music who is also known for his masterclasses and guest lectures at many of the world’s leading musical institutions, as well as being an internationally-acclaimed concert pianist himself.

It’s a golden opportunity, the magnitude of which is not lost on the aspiring virtuoso. “I’m really lucky to be able to study under him” admitted Peter. “He has been a huge influence on me and I

would really like to follow in his footsteps, and I hope to go on to do a BA in Performance under him after the Leaving Cert.”

Peter’s prospective career as a concert musician received yet another boost this summer when he attended the prestigious Aspen Music Festival & School in the USA. And, at his mentor’s suggestion, he raised funds for the trip by hosting a performance at St John’s Church of Ireland in Longford town where he played alongside both O’Conor and violinist Phoebe White. “There was a great turnout on the evening”, he said of the concert. “It was just the right size, the acoustics were wonderful and it was a warm, personal space in which to perform.”

M

Knitting their way into the Movies

A knitting project that started out in the Tullamore Library last year by the renowned textile artist Kathryn O’ Brien, is now being developed into a movie which will be set in the midlands of Ireland and directed by well known Offaly filmmaker, Paddy Slattery.

What was known as The Pilgrim’s Coat Textile Project involved a local knitting community who volunteered their time to creating a beautiful knitted coat. Each person contributed by knitting their own pieces. Their goal was to create a coat using only tones of the surrounding countryside and Sileve Bloom Mountains, with the textured stitch structures suggesting unique patterns from ancient stone sculpture, rock carvings, mountain ridges and the ploughed landscape.

The coat itself was created for the mythical character Aedh, who features in many of WB Yeats’s poems, most notably *Aedh Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven*. History also mentions an Irish Chief of the same name in *The Annals of Tigernach*

(606AD), recounting the death of Aedh on the way back from a pilgrimage at Clonmacnoise, Ireland’s earliest pilgrimage site. He was buried in Kilcormac church and it’s this story that the film will pay particular attention to.

The film will be aptly titled *The Pilgrim’s Coat* and along with directing duties, Paddy Slattery will share the producing responsibilities with Emma Owen of Babyjane Productions, an emerging company based in Galway.

Through an episodic series of interwoven stories, poetry, dance and mystic imagery, this non-narrative film will highlight the significant connection that exists between Aedh and us.

Using wool and yarn as a narrative tool, they will metaphorically explore the vibrant fabric of Aedh’s existence and examine the patterns of his behaviour.

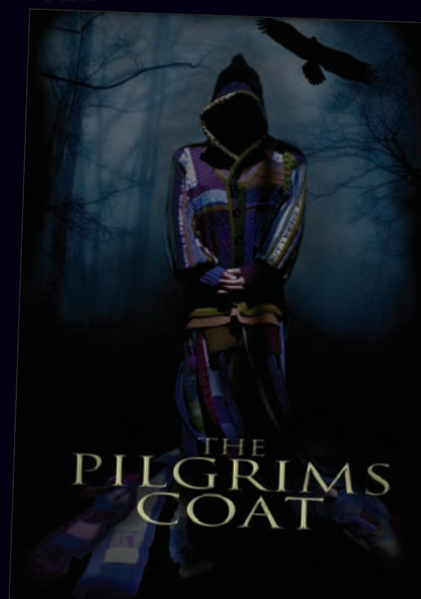
According to Paddy: *The Pilgrim’s Coat* will be a film for all ages and cultures to enjoy offering audiences a unique

glimpse into the timeless and tranquil treasures of Offaly and the surrounding midlands.”

However, before production gets under way they must raise the funds independently in order to make the film. “*Since it’s proving impossible to get support from the Arts Council, we have decided to go down the road of online crowd-funding once more following the success of a previous campaign. In a way, this is a good thing because this way we find ourselves under no creative or aesthetic obligation to an organisation, nor is there any pressure to meet a deadline. In other words; this film will be very much our own, to deliver how and when we choose,*” explained Paddy.

For more information on this exciting project check out official Facebook page *The Pilgrim’s Coat* where you can also find regular updates on their fundraising campaign and how you can become involved.

www.facebook.com/ThePilgrimsCoat M



Glimpses Of James Fintan Lalor Through The Eyes Of Children With Ann Egan

Laois County Council and Arts Office invited Ann Egan, Writer and Historian, to facilitate creative writing workshops, inspired by the life of James Fintan Lalor, with Third and Fourth Classes in Seomra Beatha an Óige, Tobar an Léinn National School, Raheen, Mountrath, County Laois.

This original process has several stages having special regard to the ages of the children and their ability to grasp and imagine life in the 1800's. There are 23 children and their ages range from 8 to 10 years. Laois native and former Laois writer-in-residence, Ann wrote a story based on an outing to Tenakill House, homeplace of James Fintan Lalor. The children wrote their stories and perceptions into the great man's life, guided by the historical and creative approach devised by Ann. There was an inspirational outing to Tenakill House hosted by Kevin Lalor-Fitzpatrick. The children, under the tutelage of their teacher, Ms Marie Moore, prepared an art display to reflect all they observed on their visit.

In September when the school reopens, the final stage of the project will be developed for the James Fintan Lalor Inaugural School. The children's work will be showcased by the launch of their book, their art display and a photographic archive capturing the entire project. For more information contact: The Arts Office, Laois County Council, Áras an Chontae, Portlaoise, County Laois Tel: 057 8664033/13 • Email: artsoff@laoiscoco.ie Web: www.laois.ie



Siobhan Cassidy, Siobhan Harton and William O'Connor
Photo by Shelley Corcoran

LUS NA GRÉINE

a hub for creativity in north Longford

by Patrick Conboy

The north Longford town of Granard is home to Lus na Gréine, a family resource centre which offers a wide range of services to the local community, one major aspect being the provision of several arts and crafts courses.

"There wasn't much to do arts-wise in Granard before," said the centre's Community Development Officer, Siobhan Harton. "But the centre is pushing arts in a big way here now. We have a busy programme and we have something to suit everyone.

"Mary Gray oversees a lot of the art classes, including a mixed group focusing on watercolours, which meets up on Wednesday mornings. As well as the classes, they also arrange outings and field trips, and organise their own exhibitions."

Siobhan herself also teaches art, holding a class for children: "The kids learn to see everything with an artist's eye. They learn how to draw and sketch properly and they take on the role of a true artist. It's a real confidence-builder for them and it proves that everyone has talent waiting to be unlocked."

The centre's pre-employment programmes also incorporate creative elements and the local Men's Shed also meets at the premises to work on projects. "They undertake more heavy-duty work," Siobhan says. "Pre-employment courses cover stuff like mosaicing and wood sculpting and the Men's Shed recently worked on an installation for the Love Longford festival which turned out to be very popular."

Other artistic disciplines covered include pottery and lino-printing. "We have a kiln for the pottery classes, which are taught by Marina Harten, and we have a lino-print press at the centre which artists can use to create gifts, cards and other products."

More traditional tastes are also catered for. Siobhan explained: "We have a craft group which meets on Thursday

mornings which makes everything from patchwork quilts and knitwear to candlestick holders. They're hoping to hold a craft fair to display and sell their work."

As if all that wasn't enough, this autumn will see even more artistic activity at Lus na Gréine. "A woodwork and paint finishing course by Carol McCabe-Browne will teach people how to upcycle old furniture," Siobhan revealed. "And, there will also be interior design classes, drama and theatre, and hopefully a film course. Then on Saturday mornings there will be a glee club aimed at children between the ages of six and 12."

For more information on Lus na Gréine's services Tel: 043 6660977, Email: lusnagreinefrc@gmail.com.

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Marian Masterson, Philomena Kelly, Rosemary Reilly and Sadie Sheridan
Photo by Shelley Corcoran



Overall winner from Cnoc Mhuire, Eoghan Gilchrist



Anti-Drugs Category Winners; Meán Scoil Mhuire, with Fergus Kennedy Arts Officer, Shelley Corcoran, Cllr. Tony Flaherty, Fiadhnaít McDonnell, Anita Griffin T.Y Co-Ordinator, Jim Maher.



Winning Anti-Drugs Photograph

Longford Schools PHOTOGRAPHER of the Year

by Patrick Conboy

The third annual Longford Schools Photographer of the Year awards were held earlier this year with more than 90 students selected from six of the county's secondary schools exhibiting work at the event which was held in the Backstage Theatre's Atrium Gallery.

"It's part of the Longford Schools Photography Programme which is the largest and longest-running programme of its kind in the country," explained County Longford Arts Officer, Fergus Kennedy. "From the programme came the publication of the Photography book

Bang, Bang, She Shot Me, which shows Longford really is at the centre of innovation in photography education in the Midlands."

Speaking at the exhibition, the programme's director and facilitator, Shelley Corcoran, said: "The quality and diversity of the work on display is symptomatic of the amount of creative talent possessed by our young people here in Longford."

With regards to the new module added, Shelley explained: "Artists make culture by commenting on culture with whatever media they work with, an effort to convince, enlighten, topple or improve. This year the Longford Schools Photography Programme, added a new module and award, this module

highlights the social issue of drink and drugs."

Expanding on this, Shelley said: "The artist's role in society is to attempt to create works that stimulate the minds of a society. If art has the responsibility of making society aware of social issues then the Longford Schools Photography Programme definitely achieved this, with students creating many highly conceptual photographs, in relation to its new module."

Those involved were asked to create a piece through image and words that would prick the conscience of the society we live in. Students from all schools reflected on this issue and came together to create works that had both artistic merit and were accessible to the audience.

Shelley underlined the philosophy of the course by saying: "We need to understand the rules of composition, the effect of perspective and the significance of light but it is the development of a critical eye, an aesthetic awareness and conceptual way of thinking that makes a photographic artist."

WINNERS

Schools Photographers of the Year:

- Daniel Howlin (Mercy Secondary School, Ballymahon)
- Rebecca Badrick (Cnoc Mhuire, Granard)
- Laura Healy (Moynes Community School)
- Celine Bolger (Mean Scoil Mhuire, Longford)
- Katarzyna Religa (Templemichael College, Longford)
- Siobhan Campbell (Ardcoil Phádraig, Granard)

Longford Schools Photograph of the Year:

- Eoghan Gilchrist (Cnoc Mhuire, Granard)

Longford Schools Photography School of the Year:

- Moynes Community School

Anti-Drugs Photograph of the Year:

- Mean Scoil Mhuire, Longford

Offline Film Festival Stages Sequel

This year's OFFline Film Festival takes place from October 9 to 13 in Birr with different 'off-shoots' around the county. The festival is fast becoming the main

one to attract visitors into Offaly and give local businesses a boost and securing a firm footing on the national calendar of film festivals.

Gary Hctor, Eugene O'Brien, Kathleen McInnis and Steph Green at OFFline Film Festival's Screenwriting workshop at the Galway Film Fleadh.



One of the main features of the festival is the Short Film Making Challenge, which to date has been attracting film teams from Ireland and the UK to compete for the coveted prize for an automatic entry into the Galway Film Fleadh. "We expect more teams to enter this year, particularly it being the year of the Gathering", said Festival Director, Gary Hctor. In July last, OFFline and FilmOffaly hosted its annual barbeque at the Galway Film Fleadh to build up the Offaly film family and this year OFFline also hosted a scriptwriting workshop with Oscar nominated director Steph Green and Offaly screenwriter Eugene O'Brien which highlighted the short film making challenge and many other workshops organised by OFFline each October.

Entries are also growing for the Short Film Completion, as many filmmakers relish

the chance to be selected for a festival screening.

"To date our numbers are up on last year" commented Hctor "and that was our first year running that aspect, so we're delighted with the large number of quality submissions."

The festival is also planning a Drive-In movie venue this year and a full programme of film screenings and build on its programmes for youth audiences which previously had films screened in Edenderry, Tullamore and Birr.

To make sure you're part of this growing festival taking place throughout Offaly you can follow the programme as it gets announced on website www.offlinefilmfestival.com or by following it on Facebook and Twitter. Tel: festival line on 085 2389416.



Lisa Reynolds, Jade and Erin Berrigan Photo by Shelley Corcoran

Lucy, Rosie and
Flanagan Photo
Shelley Corcoran

The inaugural Love Longford festival took place in Longford town, at the end of June with huge volumes of people from as far away as France coming to view the wealth of artistic talent, through pop-up art and literary exhibitions, and live musical performances that took over the town.

LOVE in

by Patrick Conboy

Locally-based artists such as Amanda Graham, Gordon Farrell, Gary Robinson and Pat Hourican drew extremely high praise from everyone who viewed their work, for their vision and distinctiveness.

Similarly, lens-based exhibits displayed by photographer Shelley Corcoran and Out-Take Films were greeted with enthusiasm.

Meanwhile, group exhibits from the Brushstrokes and Annaly artists groups, and Longford and

Shannonside camera clubs provided an outlet for the burgeoning talent of their members.

The public Art Features by Luis Na Greinne, Attic Youth Group, Ard Scoil Phadraig and St Christopher's really proved to be a big hit with both locals and tourists queuing to be photographed beside towering LOVE letters and peering through imaginative mirrors.

Music was another important aspect of the four-day event, and highlights

included a trad session headlined by the well-known traditional group Four Men & A Dog; local trad group The Scattering and an unforgettable performance by the Biggest Choir Ever in Longford and a host of local musicians who entertained the crowds in the Market Square on Sunday afternoon.

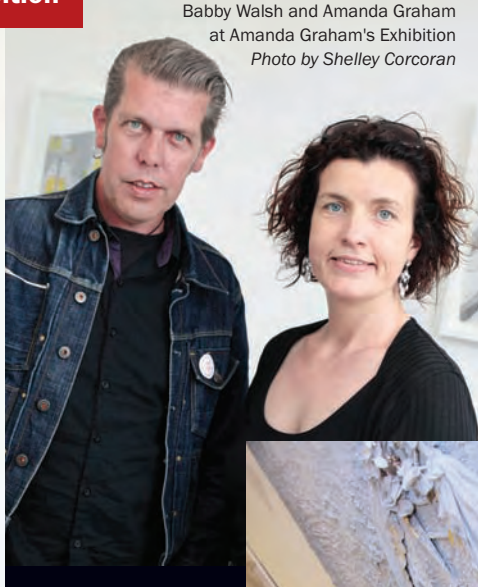
Due to the resounding success of this year's festival, Love Longford 2014 is already highly anticipated and promises to be even better than the first.

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Amanda Graham Exhibition



Babby Walsh and Amanda Graham at Amanda Graham's Exhibition Photo by Shelley Corcoran



Pat Hourican Exhibition



Pat Hourican and Stephen O'Hara at the Pat Hourican Exhibition Photo by Shelley Corcoran



Gordon Farrell Exhibition Photo by Shelley Corcoran



Ellen Prendergast, Emilie Dugdale, Laura McCullagh Photo by Shelley Corcoran



Gordon Farrell Exhibition





ing Emily
oto by
oran



LONGFORD

Gary Robinson Exhibition

Patricia
McKeon at
the Gary
Robinson
Exhibition
Photo by
Shelley
Corcoran



Gary Robinson
Photo by Shelley Corcoran

converscapes

conversations overheard on a daily amble



Longford Camera Club Exhibition

Paddy McPhipps,
Fiona Fenlon,
Michael O'Donnell,
Tom Keenan and
Anne Mulligan at
the Camera Clubs
Exhibition
Photo by Shelley
Corcoran



Shelley Corcoran Exhibition

Chloe Coyle, Shaena Keenan and
Shaena Keenan at the Shelley
Corcoran Exhibition
Photo by Shelley Corcoran



Danielle Campbell, Shania Small, Niamh Harte,
Mairead Barnes, Ard Scoil Padraig P.A. Installation
Photo by Shelley Corcoran



Out Take Film Group

Out Take Film Group who showed as part of the Love Longford Festival:
Pat Conboy, Seamus Clarke, Bobby Walsh, Brendan Magan, Gary
Robinson, Amanda Graham, Shelley Corcoran, Evelyn Kelly
Photo by Shelley Corcoran

DUNAMAISE OPEN CALL to Midland Artists

Dunamais Arts Centre is delighted to announce details of this year's Open Exhibition.

For this year's Open Submission Group Show, running from mid November through December, new Director of Dunamais, Michelle de Forge, aims to further promote and strengthen the connectivity and collaboration of the visual arts community featured prominently in the Midlands Arts Magazine since 2006.

Noel Kelly, (CEO/Director of Visual Artists Ireland and President of AICA

Ireland) has been invited to select work by artists originally from, or living in, these four counties. Dunamais Gallery will showcase this selection, which promises to present a great breadth and depth of artistic expression by emerging and established midlands based artists. A fantastic prize of a month long residency at The Arthouse, Stradbally, county Laois will be offered. This offers a rare opportunity to a selected artist to focus on creating new work in state of the art studio facilities and a supportive environment.

Gaining support from arts officers in neighbouring counties has resulted in the presentation of this year Open Show in conjunction with the Local Authority Arts Offices of Counties Laois, Longford, Offaly and Westmeath.

A professional development workshop on making successful submissions will be hosted at Dunamais by independent curator Eilís Lavelle, on Saturday, October 12.

Dunamais Arts Centre wishes to acknowledge the support and

encouragement received from Muireann Ní Chonaill, Bridie Keenan, Fergus Kennedy, Sinead O'Reilly and Muireann Mulrennan for this project.

Submission entries will be received at Dunamais Arts Centre on Monday, November 4. The Exhibition will be official opened at a reception on Friday, November 15.

Full details and application forms are available from www.dunamais.ie, Dunamais Box Office on 057 8663355 **M**

Slieve Bloom is the Setting for STORYTELLING FESTIVAL

There are very few settings more befitting a storytelling festival than the Slieve Bloom Mountains on the Laois/Offaly border. Unspoiled and ancient, it is the backdrop to many Irish legends and the natural home to the Slieve Bloom Storytelling Festival. Now in its 11th year the festival takes place from October 9 to 12 in different villages in the mountains.

The festival brings the past to life, carrying on the oral tradition in the great houses and castle halls that have played host to many tales told over the centuries. This year's festival features veterans Jack Lynch and Paddy O'Brien as well as a host of local raconteurs singers and musicians.

Paddy Flynn one of the organisers said: "We're delighted to feature Jack and Paddy as our guest storytellers this year, both are experienced and much travelled storytellers and they will bring their own distinctive styles to the event.

"Conversation is becoming a lost art form, as well as the community bonds that come with it. This festival is all about keeping conversation and the art of storytelling alive today.

"We used to rely heavily on the oral transmission of stories, histories, lessons and other knowledge to maintain a historical record and sustain Irish culture and identity. Stories were frequently told as evening family entertainment to pass along local or family knowledge. Stories were also told more formally, in ceremonies or gatherings. In the old days, some stories were told only during certain

"Conversation is becoming a lost art form, as well as the community bonds that come with it. This festival is all about keeping conversation and the art of storytelling alive today."

seasons, at a particular time of day, or in specific places. In the same vein, some stories are meant to be heard only by specific people. These stories often teach important lessons about a given society's culture, the land, and the ways in which people are expected to interact with each other and their environment.

"The passing on of these stories from generation to generation keeps the social order intact! At the Slieve Bloom Storytelling Festival we feel a cultural responsibility to preserve and promote this tradition. Relying solely on memory and improvisation, we celebrate the storytellers who create an enduring legacy of tales still told in the same manner today as when they were created generations ago."

A special feature of the festival is the Rambling House, which encourages festival-goers to participate by telling a story, singing a song, reciting a poem or playing a tune. Everyone has a party piece and the Rambling House is the perfect excuse to bring it out and dust it off. The festival kicks off with a Rambling House at Brearton's pub, in Ballybritt at 8pm on Wednesday, October 9 in what promises to be an entertaining night of music, stories and songs. Storytelling nights then move around the mountains with Roundwood House (outside Mountrath) playing host to the festival on October 10 and then Leap Castle (Kinnitty) on October 11 and 12.

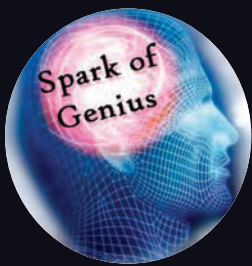
One of the important aspects of the Slieve Bloom Storytelling Festival is the annual school visits by the visiting storytellers. During the day, the storytellers travel to local primary schools, to talk about the art of storytelling and hopefully inspiring a few future yarn spinners.

ABOUT JACK LYNCH
Jack Lynch has featured at two previous Slieve Bloom festivals. A regular on the storytelling festival circuit, Jack tells a wide range of stories that draw on

Ireland's rich oral tradition. He combines folkloric elements with ancient Irish myths, wonder tales and tall tales. His stories have been heard by audiences in Ireland, England, Scotland, France, Germany, Belgium, Estonia, Jordan, the West Indies and the United States (most recently at the Smithsonian Institute Folklife Festival. He is a founding member of the Dublin Yarnspinners and of Storytellers of Ireland/ Aos Sceal Éireann)

ABOUT PADDY O'BRIEN
Paddy O'Brien is a teacher, storyteller and actor from Kerry, who lights up a room with his personality. Paddy has performed on RTÉ and at festivals throughout Ireland, where he offers a feast of contemporary, traditional and humorous stories enhanced by his imaginative delivery and own style of wit and humour.

For further information contact:
Web: www.slievebloom.ie
E-mail: info@slievebloom.ie
Facebook: www.fb.com/storytellingfestival
Tickets for the storytelling nights are €15.00 **M**



A SPARK OF GENIUS

Celebrating Cultural Heritage in Westmeath

Westmeath has a long and celebrated literary tradition but it sometimes seems that there is less awareness about other aspects of our cultural heritage. George Bernard Shaw said about creativity "You see things; and you say, 'Why?' But I dream things that never were; and I say 'Why not?'. Thankfully Westmeath is today, and probably always has been, a hive of creativity with artists and writers busily making their dreams come true.

Westmeath Library Service has long recognised that the county is rich in creativity and has tried to celebrate this not only through promotion of literature by readings, book-launches and author visits, but also through our promotion of the visual arts through the purchase of important works by local artists and by the holding of occasional art exhibitions in our branch libraries. This year Westmeath Library Service decided to celebrate the rich cultural heritage of the County during Heritage Week.

For Heritage Week this year Westmeath County Library Service picked 12 individuals who represented a range in terms of geography, medium and period to help focus on the creative heritage of the county at large.

The resulting exhibition was a series of posters which celebrated the life and works of individuals as diverse as Oliver Goldsmith and John Count McCormack, Mullingar's favourite son Joe Dolan and the poet of Fore, Michael Walsh. Current writers and illustrators are represented by Caroline Barry and Dolores Keaveney, both fine examples of people who are working in the county and engaging with the next generation to inspire the spark of genius which allows Westmeath to remain firmly on the cultural map.

Given the wealth of talent discovered, 2013 is only a first step and this is clearly a project which will be built on in the coming years.

To find out more about Westmeath and A Spark of Genius visit www.westmeathcoco.ie/library.



The Biggest Choir ever in Longford
Photo by Shelley Corcoran

Longford's BIGGEST ever choral performance

The Love Longford festival which was held in late June featured a record-breaking event, for the county at least, writes Patrick Conboy. 'The Biggest Choir Ever in Longford' brought together a number of local vocal groups including

the Longford County Choir and Innyside Singers along with choirs from Drumlish, Edgeworthstown, Lanesborough, Moyné, and Newtowncashel for a feast of choral singing in the town's Market Square. Choral Director, Edel Loftus lead an

exciting repertoire featuring a mix of classical and contemporary pieces which delighted the crowd. And as well as combined efforts, there were also opportunities for each individual group to showcase it's abilities.

Offaly Libraries Autumn AUTHOR VISITS

WRITING FOR PUBLISHING WITH OSCAR DUGGAN

Topics covered include: Overview of the Publishing Process, Self-Publishing, E-Publishing and the Rise of the E-Book and building and managing your web presence as an author. This self publishing workshop is an educational initiative which has been devised specifically for authors, writers and anyone interested in writing to and for a public audience. The aim is to help authors and writers to develop their skills with a view to getting their work published and is run in association with the Offaly County Enterprise Board **September 21, 28; October 5, 12. Workshops start at 2pm. Cost per workshop is €5 per workshop or €15 for four.**

DONAL RYAN

Donal Ryan is from Nenagh, county Tipperary and currently lives in Limerick. Donal's debut novel, *The Spinning Heart*, is co-published by The Lilliput Press and Doubleday Ireland. *The Spinning Heart* was voted overall Book of the Year at the 2012 Irish Book Awards. Donal also won Newcomer of the Year for 2012. *The Spinning Heart* has been selected for this year's Waterstones' Eleven and is due to be

released in the UK and commonwealth in June and in the US in March 2014. Donal's second novel, *The Thing About December*, will be published in September 2013.

September 27, Birr Library starting at 8pm

JEAN O'BRIEN

Jean won the Arvon International Poetry Award in 2010 for her poem *Merman*. Jean lives in Portarlington, county Offaly and will recite from her collections of poetry including *Merman*, and *Lovely Legs*.

Edenderry Library on National Poetry Day, October 3.

ALEX BARCLAY

Alex Barclay is the author of several bestselling thrillers. She studied journalism in college and went on to work as a journalist and copywriter before writing her first novel, *Darkhouse* - a *Sunday Times* Top Ten bestseller featuring NYPD detective Joe Lucchesi. Alex won the Ireland AM Crime Fiction Award at the Irish Book Awards for her third novel *Blood Runs Cold*. (use Alex Barclay image supplied)

Tullamore Library, October 17 from 8pm

GERALDINE O' NEILL

Geraldine grew up in Cleland, Lanarkshire, Scotland and in 1991 she moved to Daingean in county Offaly to teach in Daingean National School. Geraldine has published 10 bestselling novels and from the beginning of the *Tara Flynn* trilogy to her latest *Music from Home* the books have all been set in Offaly, bringing the county to an international audience.

Tullamore Library, October, 19 at 1pm



Alex Barclay coming to Tullamore Library in October

CHILDREN'S FESTIVALS



Cillian Sherry enjoying SPRAOI's Theatre for 3 year olds.



Making a Hullabaloo at Offaly's Children's Arts Festival

Now in its seventh year *Hullabaloo! Offaly's Children's Arts Festival* has gone from strength to strength, with more than 1,200 children participating in 2012 as young audiences and makers of art. Looking to the festival, which is taking place from October 30 to November 2 - to coincide with the mid-term break - the festival organisers reflect on the values of the festival and what is driving its development to expand into Edenderry in 2013.

Initiated by Offaly County Arts Office in partnership with Birr Theatre and Arts Centre back in 2007, Hullabaloo! began in Birr and then extended into Clara in 2010. This year, the festival will further reach into Edenderry, making the festival as county wide as possible, which was always the original intention.

"It was always our aim to make this a large county festival, accessible to every child in Offaly under the age of 12. We can only extend this festival outwards in partnership with the communities in each town; the library service has been a great partner and in Clara, the Family Resource Centre has been a fantastic collaborator hosting and organising events on the ground. In Edenderry, this year, it will really be a taste of the festival with events and workshops mainly in the library and Public Access Arts," explained the county Arts Officer,

Sinéad O'Reilly. Finding resources for making projects bigger is certainly difficult, but the organizers of Hullabaloo! are committed to the value and importance of the arts for young people and are determined to keep the festival growing.

For many young people, participating in the arts happens both in school and outside; however some schools are more arts rich than others and outside of the school gates, there are many factors that influence whether a child has access to music, drama or dance.

The Government's recent Arts in Education Charter, published jointly by the Department of Arts and Department of Education represents for the first time a need to recognise, co-ordinate and promote greater access to the arts during school education. This new

charter is generating a lot of discussion and focus on existing good practice, the gaps in provision and the importance of access to the arts for children in non-formal education settings.

Recently, a conference by the Council of National Cultural Intuitions on Arts in Education (held in the National Gallery of Ireland) highlighted that "It is important that we have a dialogue between theories of pedagogy and artistic expression as well as having an ongoing curiosity on how to use these to make the arts live more vividly in everyone's experience".

With more of national focus than ever on children accessing the arts, (Music Generation being another major influence) the importance of Hullabaloo is clear. Emma Nee Haslam, founder of the festival and Manager of Birr Theatre and Arts Centre said: "When children

participate in activities in the arts, they are using sound, movement, gesture, marks, form and image to express their ideas and feelings. The key learning area of the arts is able to provide children with unique and multiple ways of exploring, forming, expressing, communicating and understanding their own and others' ideas and feelings."

But she added: "Of course, we don't present the festival in such a serious way to children, they would run a mile... this is all wrapped up in an exciting four days of magic and mayhem during Hullabaloo!"

A programme for the festival can be accessed online at www.birrtheatre.com or at www.offaly.ie/arts. Tel: 057 9122911 or follow **Hullabaloo! Children's Arts Festival** on Facebook.



Looking ahead to Aisling 2013 is Childs Play

This October sees the return of the annual Aisling Children's Arts Festival in Longford. The county-wide event is now in its 16th year and has remained entirely volunteer-run since its inception in 1998....

"The main objective is to reach out to all kids and bring the arts to them," says Aisling committee member, Angela Crossan. "We want to encourage children from all walks of life, and that's why we have free open days and subsidised performances."

During the week-long festival, these events will take place in schools and other venues around the county, fostering creativity in children and showcasing local artists.

Angela explains: "The festival will open with a Family Fun Day at St Michael's National School in Longford town, with workshops and other free activities. Then throughout the week there will be more workshops at various locations, exhibitions, dramatic performances and a Mimiríchi show at the Backstage Theatre. We incorporate a number of outreach programmes, too. Some of the workshops have to be pre-booked, so we advise parents to check our brochures and local media for details."

"Aisling is completely non-profit," Angela adds. "We rely on the support of local sponsors, Longford County Council, the HSE, and the Arts Council to ensure the festival continues to be a success."

The Aisling Festival runs from October 20 to 26. Visit www.aislingfestival.ie or email aislingfestival@hotmail.com for more information. **M**



Katie Hutchinson
Photo by Shelley Corcoran



Aoife Jones, Caoimhe Casey,
Leanne Diviney and Elaine Murphy
Photo by Shelley Corcoran

Exploration of an Old Process

Offaly artist Michael Thatcher has been working on a new process to create a body of work over the past five years combining ancient techniques with modern technology.

Michael Thatcher *Fukushima Ontagion*



The artist Michael Thatcher presenting one of his paintings to President Higgins at Aras an Uachtairain.

Starting with the traditional and ancient painting technique of fresco, then using the modern Giclee process (pronounced zhee-clay – a long lasting digital Fine Art reproduction process) to reproduce the paintings, Michael has produced a limited edition collection of 10 paintings which are set for imminent launch.

Michael explained that the reason he decided to use this ancient method of painting in combination with developments in digital technology was because he discovered “by chance (or was it intuition?), the very fine reflective quality of fresco materials which respond brilliantly when subjected to light.

“I found that this reflectivity also transferred dramatically when subject to the light involved at the different stages of digitally reproducing the work. I use the fresco technique on board, creating texture, movement and in particular, reflective-ness.”

Michael explained: “My work is mainly concerned with the development of painting techniques; I am always looking for ways to create exciting new imagery. As an artist I have always been interested in exploring new materials and methods and incorporating new technologies into my work. In my own way, I am embracing Ireland’s call for innovation and its need to create a new and dynamic economy. I am interested to see if I can contribute to that conversation!”

ABOUT GICLÉE

Giclée was developed in 1991 by printmaker Jack Duganne for fine art digital prints made on inkjet printers. It is a reproduction process controlled by a crystal frequency that applies millions of pigment ink particles in a microscopic inkjet spray. The name originally applied to fine art prints created on IRIS printers in a process invented in the late 1980s but has since come to mean any inkjet print. It is often used by artists, galleries, and

print shops to denote high quality printing. It is a process that is used by many national cultural institutions, including the Royal Academy of Arts in London.

ABOUT FRESCO PAINTING

Fresco Painting is a method of painting water-based pigments on freshly applied plaster, usually on wall surfaces. The colours are made by grinding dry-powder pigments in pure water, which dry and set with the plaster to become a permanent part of the wall. True fresco is the most durable technique and consists of the following process; three successive coats of specially prepared plaster, sand, and sometimes marble dust are troweled onto a wall. Each of the first two rough coats is applied and then allowed to set while, the artist transfers the outlines of the design onto the wall. The final, smooth coat (*intonaco*) of plaster is then troweled onto as much of the wall as can be painted in one session.

The boundaries of this area are confined carefully along contour lines, so that the edges, or joints, of each successive section of fresh plastering are imperceptible. A correctly prepared *intonaco* will hold its moisture for many hours, while the painter dilutes his colours with water and applies them with brushstrokes to the plaster, the colours are imbibed into the surface, and as the wall dries and sets, the pigment particles become bound or cemented along with the lime and sand particles. This gives the colours great permanence and resistance to aging, since they are an integral part of the wall surface, rather than a superimposed layer of paint on it.

The medium of fresco makes great demands on a painter’s technical skill, since he must work fast (while the plaster is wet) but cannot correct mistakes by over painting;

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INDEPENDENCE HERO UNVEILED BY TAOISEACH

The county Longford village of Ballinalee paid homage to its most famous son this summer when a statue of General Seán Mac Eoin was unveiled by the Taoiseach, Enda Kenny.

Speaking in Ballinalee, Mr Kenny described General Mac Eoin as an “inspirational and motivational” leader.

Local Councillor, Michael Carrigy, who led efforts to have the sculpture erected, said: “The monument will not just be a testament to the man himself, it will also stand as recognition of the courage and patriotism of all of the men and women of North Longford in the nation’s struggle for independence”.

Known as The Blacksmith of Ballinalee due to his peacetime profession, General Mac Eoin led the North Longford Flying Column during the War of Independence and later took charge of the army’s Western Command, headquartered at Custume Barracks in Athlone. After retiring from the army as its Chief of Staff, he turned to politics and held the posts of Minister for Justice and Minister for Defence before running unsuccessfully for president on two occasions.

The bronze statue, designed by Mayo sculptor Rory Breslin, depicts a youthful Mac Eoin in his military uniform, standing next to an anvil with a copy of the Constitution of Ireland in his hand. “This seemingly simple presentation tells the story of his background, his daring and courageous youth, and his later dedication to constitutional politics”, Breslin explains. “This narrative encapsulates the brief while retaining a freshness capturing the vitality of the man.”

The County’s Arts Officer, Fergus Kennedy, added that the Seán Mac Eoin statue is part of a wider plan by the County Council to introduce public art installations throughout Longford: “Not only is this project a fitting memorial to a Longford man who has achieved historical status, it will also contribute to the visual enhancement of the attractive village of Ballinalee. It is just one of a number of public art commissions being undertaken by Longford County Council in 2012 and 2013.” **M**



Clifford 'Making Tracks' in the RHA

Mary Clifford



Louise Coghlan spoke to Midlands based artist Mary Clifford about her acceptance to the RHA and what it means to receive such an accolade.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe once said: "Every day we should hear at least one little song, read one good poem, see one exquisite picture, and, if possible, speak a few sensible words."

And when speaking to Westmeath-based artist Mary Clifford on her recent acceptance to the RHA, I listened to a very enchanting lady who spoke nothing but sensible words and from observing her work, I quickly found out, this lady paints quite a lot of exquisite pictures.

Mary, a native of Tralee is married to Bill with one daughter Sarah, has lived in Athlone, "longer than she has lived anywhere else".

With her birth roots in the Kingdom and her schooling and college years in Limerick, Mary has seen many a beautiful landscape. Even though her early years were centered in Munster, Mary's heart has been very much firmly grounded in the Midlands for the last 30 years.

The recent announcement that Mary's painting *Making Tracks* was selected to be part of the longest running open submission exhibition in the country The 183rd Annual Exhibition at the Royal Hibernian Academy (RHA) in Dublin, once again reminds us all why she is such a unique and treasured painter of our time.

"Professionally it's the highest accolade a professional artist can receive in Ireland because the membership base consists of artists considered to be excelling in their field."

In speaking to Mary, her instant warmth of character is tangible. Within seconds, you can sense her caring and attention to detail in conversation and when examining her work closely, it is these fantastic characteristics that positively seep from her paintings.

Speaking of her recent success at the RHA Exhibition the grounded Mary simply said: "I'm very lucky that this is actually my second time to be accepted into the RHA exhibition. My first piece was chosen in 1997 and it was a very exciting time for me - but to be chosen for a second time, really means just as much."

Mary also explained the arduous process to secure a place in the exhibition. "With over 3,000 entries in the initial

open submission and then through a vigorous screening process those pieces were then reduced down to 1700 and I was very excited when two of my paintings made the cut.

"And when the news came through that my painting *Making Tracks* was chosen as one of the selected 300 pieces, it really was such fantastic news. Being selected to be part of the RHA Exhibition never loses its exciting appeal and means so much on two levels really; one being professionally and the other being personal.

"Professionally it's the highest accolade a professional artist can receive in Ireland because the membership base consists of artists considered to be excelling in their field. There is also recognition from people who invest in art of the status and quality of being accepted by the RHA selection committee.

"Personally being an artist is a solitary profession, constantly drawing on your internal resources, keeping faith with yourself, your ability and dreams, can be a long lonely journey. Therefore having your work selected by artists of the caliber of the RHA selection committee is an affirmation of all the effort."

Making Tracks offers the onlooker more than just a picture, as it really is an exquisite representation of capturing a moment in time and telling a tale as well.

"What I see, you might see completely differently. *Making Tracks* was a picture I painted around the time of the heavy snowfall. I love painting snow. I really think snow can transform the most

ordinary landscape to something very special. There is a farm behind my house and one morning I went out walking the dogs in the field," explained Mary.

"The farmer had already been out in his tractor and there was a very distinct track through the snow and the minute I saw it, I said I had to paint it. And it was this very picture that was chosen by the RHA. I guess in life we are all making tracks so I think it is an apt title. Sometimes we can see the tracks and other times we can't but no matter what, these tracks are part of our lives and part of our landscapes."

Westmeath-based artist Terence O'Connell spoke of his admiration for Mary: "I'm delighted she got selected, particularly for the work she does. This is a major recognition for her years painting landscapes and it really is good news. I first met Mary when we were both part of The Midlands Watercolour Society, which ran back in the 1990's. We would have put on group exhibitions together and I'm really happy for her. The part I like best is that she paints landscapes from around the area which is great as to know the Midlands is represented in such a recognised exhibition in Dublin means so much."

This accolade goes some way to demonstrate how Mary's friendly personality and creative view on the world has transferred so fluently to the easel of her watercolour outlook.

Landscapes will always be magical and mastered with Mary in this world bringing colour and creations to life and by her very brush stroke; she too is 'making tracks' wherever she goes.

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Offaly Youth Theatre at their 2012 Easter Showcase
Photo by Clare Dunne



Offaly Youth Theatre EXPANDS TO EDENDERRY

Offaly Youth Theatre (Birr and Tullamore) has expanded in 2013 to include a new chapter in Edenderry. The project teaches acting for the stage and screen and is aimed at the 14 and over age group.

Chairperson of Offaly Youth Theatre, Cllr Molly Buckley said: It is all about young people being freely and safely be expressive; it is not necessarily about creating Oscar winning actors - although wouldn't that be great - but about being able to imagine that anything is possible.

"I've noticed that whatever teen-agers sometimes lack in vocabulary they make up by adding drama to everything, so I am sure that getting involved in Youth Theatre is a natural progression for many young people!"

She added: I have no doubt that this is one of the best youth projects to happen in Offaly for many years and rest assured - the adults, quietly behind the scenes in this project - will make sure that then young voice is the most important voice in this project."

To join Offaly Youth Theatre please contact Janine Wilson at offalyyouththeatre@gmail.com or follow Offaly Youth Theatre on Facebook and Twitter. Offaly Youth Theatre is affiliated with the National Association of Youth Drama.

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Young artists Shania McCormack and Jade Feeney
Picture Denis Byrne.

Pictured with a sample of their work for the "Little Women" exhibition were St. Joseph G.N.S pupils Susie Manzye, Hannah Ledesma and Alannah Conroy.
Picture Denis Byrne.



Pictured at the Little Women Exhibiton at Mountmellick Art Gallery was Artist and Tutor, Gemma Guihan with Sister Rosarii, Rachel McInerney, Hannah Ledesma and Thailer Smith.
Picture Denis Byrne.

Little Women

The exhibition *Little Women*, launched in Mountmellick Library, Laois in May was the culmination of a collaborative arts residency with Artist Gemma Guihan in St Josephs Girls NS, Mountmellick, as part of the Laois Artists in Schools Programme 2012. The students made wonderful figurines based on the characters of the novel *Little Women*.

Gemma worked over a period of eight weeks with the students, introducing them to the classic novel *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott, written in 1860.

The students embarked on a visual exploration of the novel through listening to readings, accompanied by visuals of dress design and fashion of the 19th century, gradually becoming acquainted with the four main characters in the book - the March sisters Meg, Jo, Beth and Amy.

Materials associated with this particular era were introduced to the class to inform them of various textures and colours that may have been worn by the sisters.

Choosing a particular March sister, the students explored movement and structure, sometimes encouraged to actually physically stand in the actual pose they had chosen for their figure, to come to a better understanding of the character's movement and structure. Building up, and modelling with various papers, the figures were finally painted and placed on to clay stands designed and modelled by each student. Gemma said: "The *Little Women* project

was prompted by my own long-held interest in 19th century classic novels, and so, believing that if I am passionate about the project that I proposed, it would in turn convey itself to the students.

"Through experience I have found that working with a tutor who has passion for their subject matter will, in time, engage even the most reluctant student; and so it was, the entire project from beginning to end flowed naturally with full support from students, teachers, principal and staff."

Gemma said that the only stipulation regarding this project from the class teacher was that each student could take home an individual piece of work at the end of the eight weeks. "It seemed a natural progression therefore for me to choose papier mache, a favourite medium of mine, for the students to create and model their own sculpture, based on the knowledge they would gain as we explored the lives and world of *Little Women* reading the novel and researching and viewing visuals of the fashions of the period. "They were encouraged to actually stand

or sit in the pose chosen for their sculpture the better to understand it. Manipulating the wire armatures, the students gained instruction on basic anatomy, portraiture and in time modelling and sculpting skills, and discovering the qualities and possibilities of paper along the way."

Each student created a sculpture inspired by one of the March sisters. During this time they were also guided through studio practice and colour mixing, and finally clay modelling, designing and painting the base on which their sculpture would eventually be secured and displayed. Materials, jewellery, and objects were brought into the class room to convey the textures and atmosphere of the 1860's.

Gemma added: "In conjunction with these workshops I introduced the class to my own sculptures and paintings, giving them an insight into my daily practice and the processes involved in creating my work."

The Library
Speaking after the exhibition, Librarian Enda McEvoy said: "The recent *Little*

Women exhibition in Mountmellick Library was certainly one of the most memorable from the library's perspective. I think this was because the exhibition was the perfect way to mark the end stage of the project, and it acted as an ideal showcase of the entire process - starting with the Arts Office's initiation of the project, followed by the actual creation and decoration of the figurines.

The project is one of a number of residencies funded through the Artists in Schools Scheme with Laois Arts Office. The scheme allows students to have an in-depth experience with the professional artist and the opportunity to experience different art media.

During the last nine years of the programme up to 80 schools in Laois have benefited from some wonderfully creative and imaginative arts projects, and worked with highly professional artists.

For more information contact the Arts Office, Laois County Council, Tel: 057 8664033 or email artsoff@laoiscoco.ie or see www.laois.ie.





Artist Karen Hendry is Shaped by The Absent Ocean

Karen Hendry is a nomadic painter. The influences of *traveling* the country and from staying in unfamiliar places inform her artistic practice, visual language and colour pallet.

Born and reared in Kenmare, the sea and rocky coastline of Ireland's Atlantic seaboard must have been a significant influence in her childhood and possibly on her artistic ideas and perception.

Although her family later moved to Laois, her work still continues to centre on the sea.

Given that her work appears mature and solidly founded, it may come as a surprise that Karen is a relative newcomer in the Irish art scene. In 2006 she decided to give up a promising bank career to fulfill a lifelong interest in art and to study painting at NCAD and later at the Burren College of Art.

Fairly quickly she gained a reputation as a painter on a national scale with her work being shown at Eigse, The Royal Ulster Academy, Royal Hibernian Academy and most recently at Ev+a International. In fact, her work was acquired for national collections including the Houses of Oireachtas.

In 2011, Karen was chosen as one of the first professional artists in residence based in The Arthouse, Stradbally located in the re-developed old courthouse and managed by county Laois Arts officer Muireann Ní Chonail.

Karen's paintings and drawings are grounded in the philosophical theories of change and permanence. Despite being void of any realism in their nature, Karen states that landscape is the underlying source of her paintings. This hidden reality appears to be a constant preoccupation, forming a consistently recurring thread in Karen's work to date.

A current series of paintings and drawings clearly shows the influence of landscape elements, geological features and - surprisingly - curachs (Karen has recently taken up rowing these iconic West coast boats!). The initial source of this sea-influenced work is Horse Island, a small, now uninhabited offshore island near Ballycastle, which she explored during a stay at the Ballinglen Arts Foundation in 2012. Greys of rocks, deep blues of the ocean and yellows and greens from the land amalgamate in a rich tapestry of colours and shapes that have become a dominant aspect of Karen's pallet.

These blocks of tones often form the background to a maze of interwoven lines and marks, sometimes incorporating and utilising found objects (objets trouvés) that she encounters during her travels: nets, ropes and sticks form. These various elements form the core vocabulary of Karen's visual language.

As a painter, she is proficient in a wide range of artistic media that include inks, oil and acrylic

paints, charcoal and pastel. These are, however, often adventurously combined with unconventional materials and pigments such as moorland peat, shells and bark. They give the work a strong texture and tactile quality and further increase the painting's three-dimensional aspects.

Beside the main focus on her own painting, Karen also delivered a number of community workshops and projects as part of the residency at the Arthouse.

During another brief residency for Abbeylax Arts Festival in 2011 Karen held a four day workshop project with the local children from Scoil Mhuire in which children explored different ways of using materials to draw and paint, which was informed by her own practice.

Various other projects involved one-day workshops in her studio and on one occasion working with children from Chernobyl. Adults on National Drawing day, Open studios on Culture night, Bealtaine Festival, Christmas workshops and summer camps for children provided other opportunities for outreach work.

On a very different level of producing work for and with members of the public, she was involved in a recycling project for the Electric Picnic Music Festival, both in 2012 and 2013. Along with four other artists she was chosen to design and build a lighting installation using 2,000 recycled bottles in combination with LED lights. The honeycomb shape installation was installed on the Art Trail for the duration of the festival. During the first year the installation developed into an interactive piece for the children who had great fun trying to assemble after some sections had been removed during the first night of the festival.

While The Arthouse offers Karen a regular studio base to work in, she has spent much of her career as a painter as artist-in residence in art centres including The Cill Rialaig Project in Kerry and the Tyrone Guthrie Centre in Monaghan. [M](#)

ACCOLADES

She will soon return to Annaghmakerrig, as she was recently granted the County Laois bursary (each county council offers one residency a year to a local professional artist).

■ Karen was awarded a fellowship at the Ballinglen Arts Foundation, an international art centre based run by artistic entrepreneurs from the US which saw Karen spend her time photograph and document the rich archaeology and natural environment of North Mayo.

■ Karen was invited to be the first resident artist of Artistic Alliance (www.artisticalliance.eu) in Cobh, county Cork. This inspiring residency opportunity was founded and is run by Richard Scott, an enthusiastic art lover, cultural entrepreneur and collector from Cork. Here she spent six weeks May to June focusing on new work inspired by the historic maritime environment of the town. While this solitary, yet very comfortable set-up offered a very different experience from all other residencies, it resulted in great inspiration with recognisable influence in her latest work.

Karen's will hold a solo show in the Dunamais Art Centre, Portlaoise in October and if you miss that, her work will be on show in Ballymaloe House, Shanagarry, county Cork in November after her.

See www.karenhendyartist.com



Time and Place **Captured**

From an early age photography was a huge passion for Edenderry man Ollie Byrne and although other interests came and went his love of the photographic medium never faded.

In 2010 Ollie made a decision and decided to focus on his passion full time and through self-study, courses and constantly photographing the landscape, he worked on refining his photographic style.

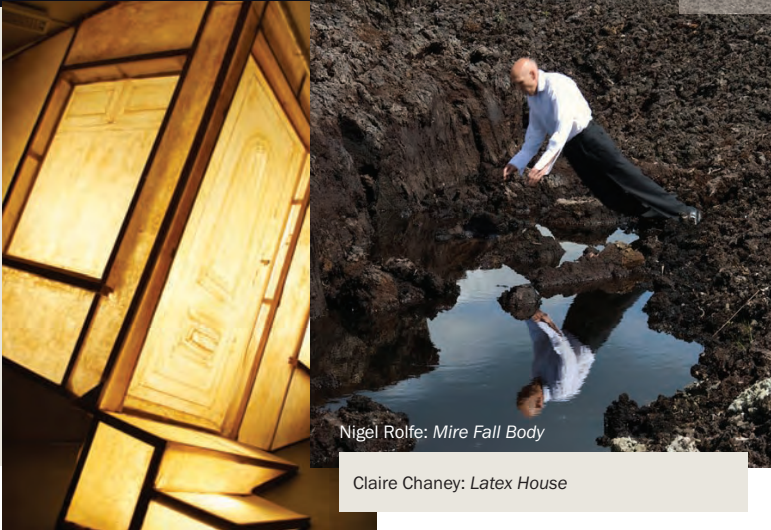
His strict aesthetic is striking and seems to help him avoid the trap of imitation or the creation of decorative art but instead to create images of true meaning and value.

His current collection of works titled Of Time And Place consists of 10 pieces of monochrome landscape photography taken between 2011 and 2013. It will be exhibiting at Public Access Arts, Edenderry, county Offaly until October 4 and at the Arthouse, Stradbally, county Laois from October 17 until November 15.

See www.olliebyrne.com for more information. **M**



Lone Boat by Ollie Byrne



Nigel Rolfe: Mire Fall Body

Claire Chaney: Latex House

Tullamore Lays Foundations for **Town Art**

A new exhibition trail has been created around Tullamore to celebrate Tullamore Community Arts Centre's foundations being laid at the end of the year.

Foundation 13, curated by Tullamore artist Brendan Fox in partnership with Offaly County Arts Office and the board of the Arts Centre, is aimed at highlighting international contemporary arts practice in preparation for the opening of the centre.

"Rather than focusing on two dimensional or traditional wall hung work, **Foundation 13** will encompass innovative yet accessible video, sculpture, installation, multimedia, performance, light and sound and will occupy multiple spaces in Tullamore town," explained Brendan.

The lineup of artists includes renowned artist Nigel Rolfe along with many emerging and local artists such as

Claire Chaney, Aoife Carbury, David Fox, Ian Keaveny, Tim Mann, Nicky Hooper and Veronica Nicholson. With the increasing number of empty commercial units all over Ireland, artists and their work have become progressively visible on high streets and other designated commercial areas.

As a result of the trend in occupying otherwise unused spaces and often working more and more with communities, contemporary arts practice has evolved. Pop-up Art spaces are now thriving amidst the saturation of advertisements and the bombarding commerce of town and city centres, offering the public a window into an alternative use of shared public space. The event includes workshops, talks with artists, curators, gallery owners and facilitators, theatre and art house cinema nights, tours and more will be officially launched at Tullamore Library on September 26 at 6.30pm. It will then run from this date until October 24.

For more information see www.foundation-13.com or Email: info@foundation-13.com. **Opening days and times: Thursday - Sunday, 11am to 6pm** **M**

John Lennon Bus Parks Up in Laois

Music Generation has partnered with the John Lennon Educational Tour Bus to run its first a Irish tour which had a stop off in Laois this summer.

bringing a real sense of excitement to music education across Ireland this summer.

"We commend Yoko Ono for mobilising such a wonderful resource for young people as a way in which to create better access to music – a vision that is shared by Music Generation's philanthropic donors U2 and The Ireland Funds and the Local Music Education Partnerships with whom we work."

The bus, which contains state of the art recording studios made a visit to Áras an Chontae, Portlaoise, in August and eight lucky students from Music Generation Laois got the opportunity to experience this extraordinary vehicle.

Brian Rothschild, Executive Director of The John Lennon Educational Tour Bus, said: "It is fantastic to be touring Ireland and meeting so many vibrant young people."

The John Lennon Educational bus is dedicated to providing the young people of Europe with free, hands-on opportunities to produce original music, video, photo, game app and broadcast projects.

The bus has worked with a variety of local charities and artists across the UK with visitors including legendary guitarist Earl Slick and Yoko Ono herself.

Commenting on the tour, Rosaleen Molloy, National Director of Music Generation, said: "We are delighted to have this fantastic opportunity to work with the John Lennon Bus team and

The UK and European tour schedule plus interactive map can be found at www.lennonbus.org where visitors can also see all of the content created on board. **M**

Pictured at the John Lennon Educational Tour Bus during its stop at County Hall, Portlaoise, were, participants: Sarah Luttrell, Ballybrittas; Ruth Hyland, Clough; Ciara Faherty, Portarlinton; Grace Flanagan, Abbeyleix; Yellana Dunne, Portlaoise; Alison Sweeney, Music Generation Laois; Pietro Rossi, Lennon Bus Producer; Corey Marum, Portlaoise; Ciaran Rowney, Ballyfin and Vojtech Dzudza, Portlaoise. *Photo: Michael Scully*





St Colmcille's Pipe Band

St Colmcille's Pipe Band from Tullamore were victorious at the World Championships in Glasgow on Saturday Aug 17th. Hundreds lined the streets of Tullamore to welcome home the pipers, whose remarkable season included being crowned British Champions on May 25th 2013. The Band was founded in 1911, making it the third oldest in Pipe Band in Ireland. The band practices collectively twice weekly, with classes in piping and drumming available for new members. Pipe Major John Leamy said, "We've enjoyed tremendous support from the people of Tullamore and we're delighted to give something back to them in the shape of this world title. I hope that this success will encourage more people to join the band as we need to swell the ranks as we move up through the grades." for more information on the band .contact Pat Nolan - 087 610 1773 or email topoftheleft@yahoo.co.uk or follow them on Facebook. **M**



Pat Middleton, Joe Mooney and John Leamy of St. Colmchille's Pipe Band, pictured at Tullamore Train Station where they performed for National Music Day. *Pic: Clare Dunne*



RTE National Symphony Orchestra in Tullamore

On December 4th 2013, the RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra will play in the Tullamore Court Hotel.

It is not often that the RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra play outside the Dublin, Cork or Limerick and the opportunity to play in Tullamore has come about through Wide Open Music and an Arts Council Touring Grant, which also include dates in Castlebar and Kilkenny.

The tour concept developed by Wide Open Music includes an opportunity for local young musicians to receive master classes from some of the NSO musicians leading up to the concert. The students will also get a chance to

perform on the night alongside some of their new 'tutors' and to be conducted by Fergus Sheil.

Conducted by Fergus Sheil, this high-octane concert has a virtuosic and colourful symphonic repertoire. Max Bruch's Scottish Fantasy, a rhythmic and colourful classical interpretation of Scotland's sights and sounds and Stravinsky's ballet suite The Firebird deploying the full orchestral resources to depict a celebrated Russian fairytale. Coupled with these, two more recent works, Danzón No. 2, an infectiously joyous Latin American dance by Mexican composer Arturo Márquez and the improbable dance of Chairman Mao from John Adams' opera Nixon in China will ensure audiences will hear the orchestra at its absolute best.

TICKETS: €16 (€14 conc.) BOOKING: 057 934 6666 **M**

BALLET IRELAND puts best foot forward in Laois

This autumn ballet enthusiasts can take in Ballet Ireland's new ballet, Carmen.

Against the backdrop of Bizet's passionate score this scorching story unleashes the creative talents of Ballet Ireland's choreographer in residence, Morgann Runacre-Temple. Carmen follows the story of a young, naïve soldier Jose, who is bewitched by the beautiful and fiery gypsy, Carmen

Obsessed and reckless, Jose turns his back on respectable life to be with her. But Carmen, like love, is a bird that cannot be tamed and Jose's desire to possess her eventually destroys them both.

This age old story, as relevant today as ever, will be re-told in a modern setting.

Runacre-Temple's up to date style "gets it", according to the Irish Times, stretching classical ballet to new heights.

Passion, drama and colour in abundance! Ballet Ireland's talented dancers will sizzle in this fantastic new ballet.

Dunamais, Portlaoise
Tuesday, November 26 at 7.30pm
Ticket prices: €20 / €18 / €56 (Family of 4)
Booking: Tel: 057 8663355
www.dunamais.ie
www.balletireland.ie

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There's more to Offaly's GERARD BYRNE than FAIR CITY

Talk to Offaly actor Gerard Byrne for even five minutes and you can pretty quickly hear this is a man who was always destined to work with his voice. A gifted communicator, he speaks in a deep, mellifluous tone which is easy on the ear and easy to understand.

But the way he tells it, there was no history of performing in his family apart from occasional sing-songs at family gatherings. He doesn't recall performing in plays at St. Mary's National School in Edenderry or even at secondary school, though he remembers being fascinated by life on the stage when he went on school trips to see the pantomime. So why did he get in to acting? "I am not really sure. There was no real history of formal performance in the family. But as kids we had family get-togethers with relations who would visit us from the United States or when we visited Granny near Rathkeale, Co. Limerick. We always had gatherings and sing-songs. I learned the piano and the violin. Like many Irish families, the violins and tin whistles would be trotted out at family gatherings." He jokingly hazards a guess that modern curtain technology may have played a role in developing his appetite for the stage: "It

was the invention of the Swish curtain rail that got me started. The red velvet curtains were drawn back and I would play music."

The son of an Offaly businessman, who had worked in a shoe factory before setting up his own grocery and newsagents, Byrne was one of a family of five.

In his teen years, Byrne did have a notion he might like to act, but had no plans to follow through on what was then only a vague idea. Indeed, when in the late seventies he went to University College, Dublin to study French and German, he was too afraid to join the Drama Society which was touting for members during Freshers' Week.

Byrne graduated from UCD in 1981 and went to live in Frankfurt where he worked

for car manufacturer Saab as an interpreter – translating from German to English before returning to Dublin after his father had a stroke.

Finding himself unexpectedly back in Ireland, he finally decided to venture for the first time into acting by enrolling in the renowned and long-established Brendan Smith Academy of Acting. Theatre impresario Brendan Smith, had formerly run the Olympia Theatre and was the founder in 1957 of the Dublin Theatre Festival. At the time Byrne was working in a shipping company by day and doing the acting course by night. But when the shipping company asked him to take up a position in Hamburg, where he could put his German to use on behalf of his employer, Byrne decided he wanted to stay in Dublin because the acting bug had bitten him hard.

In 1986, Joe Dowling set up the Gaiety School of Acting. You had to audition to be accepted in the school. With the help of his teachers in the Brendan Smith Theatre Academy, Byrne made the grade alongside about 20 others. There, his classmates included Claudia Carroll, Deirdre O'Kane and Sheila McWade.

After completing the Gaiety School of Acting, Byrne auditioned for, and got, his first ever professional role with the Passion Machine Theatre Company. It was a play called THE BIRDTABLE, and was written and directed by Brendan Gleeson, who later would make it big both in Ireland and in Hollywood. Playwright and Artistic Director of Passion Machine Paul Mercier, followed up by offering him the lead role in HOME, this time acting alongside Gleeson, who played his close friend. Indeed they have remained real-life close friends ever since! "HOME put both

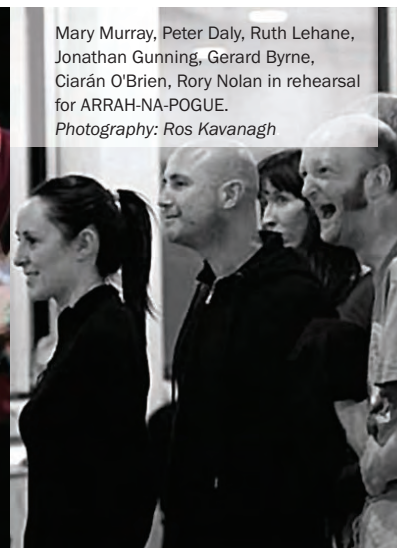
L-R Stephen Swift (Bilton), Killian Burke (Stephen), Aonghus Óg McAnally (Charles Lomax), Gerard Byrne (Morrison) and Liz Fitzgibbon (Sarah) during rehearsals for Major Barbara by Bernard Shaw. *Photography: Ros Kavanagh.*



Jonathan Gunning, Peter Daly and Gerard Byrne in ARRAH-NA-POGUE by Dion Boucicault, directed by Mikel Murfi. *Photography: Colm Hogan.*



Mary Murray, Peter Daly, Ruth Lehane, Jonathan Gunning, Gerard Byrne, Ciarán O'Brien, Rory Nolan in rehearsal for ARRAH-NA-POGUE. *Photography: Ros Kavanagh*





Gerard has appeared in several stage and television productions through his illustrious career

- 2010 **Noreen**
- 2009 **Fair City** (from 1996)
- 2004 **Happy Birthday Oscar Wilde**
- 2002 **The Last**
- 2001 **Tupperware**
- 1998 **Crushproof**
- 1997 **Before I Sleep**
- 1993 **The Snapper**
- 1992 **Heaven Only Knows**
- 1991 **Brutal Glory**
- 1991 **Nighthawks** (from 1988)
- 1990 **After Midnight**
- 1990 **The Truth About Claire**
- 1989 **Clara Schumann**
- 1988 **A Matter Of Life And Debt**

of us on the map", he now recalls. The play was a great success, transferring to the Olympia in 1988. To this day, Byrne considers the part he played in Home as one of his favourite roles. "Home was about a chap from Westmeath called Michael. He came up to Dublin from Westmeath during the eighties recession. He had broken the apron strings with Mammy and gone to Dublin to train as a hotel manager. I played Michael, a country boy stuck in city-land."

Byrne had another lucky break when Mercier offered him (and Gleeson) a part in Roddy Doyle's comedy BROWNBREAD, after two other actors pulled out. He played the part of a kidnapped bishop. For years afterwards - and probably still - the framed poster of me as the bishop with a gun to his head, hung in the bar in the Olympia, much to the amusement of hundreds of theatre punters!", he says.

Another favourite role was the part of John Millen in Frank McGuinness's play Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme. The play was revived in 1994 to coincide with the IRA ceasefire and the beginning of the peace process in Northern Ireland.

It was a success not just at home, but also in Scotland, England and especially France where he still recalls a rapturous Paris audience insisting on a twenty minute curtain call.

Observe the Sons of Ulster took Byrne out of circulation for the best part of two years until 1996. Until that time, he had done relatively little screen work, apart from some small movie roles and a brief stint as a school teacher in RTE's Fair City.

But then RTE came knocking again, this time offering him the role of a priest in Fair City. Byrne was fearful of becoming typecast as a parish priest, especially given that he had already played various ecclesiastical roles no fewer than nine times. He didn't want to end up as just another traditional parish priest.

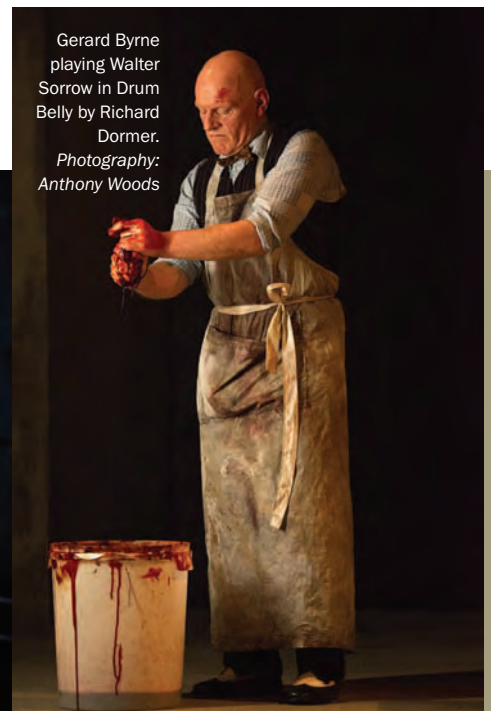
But the winds of change were blowing in Ireland and Byrne was persuaded by the character of Malachy, a radical missionary priest who had a moral dilemma around having an affair while remaining in the priesthood, a role in which many TV viewers will still remember him, though he left the series five years ago. Byrne has since returned to theatre and is currently starring in George Bernard Shaw's Major Barbara at the

Abbey. He has also starred in other recent Abbey productions including Drum Belly and Oscar Wilde's The Picture of Dorian Gray.

These days Byrne lives in Dublin, but retains links to Offaly where his brother, niece and cousins still live. Asked if Eugene O'Brien's Pure Mule TV series and play Eden were reflective of the reality of life in Edenderry, Byrne said that he thought O'Brien had captured Edenderry very well on both screen and stage. "It was a small town with very big, colourful characters."

Looking back, Byrne (54) reckons too that as a shy person, he needed to find a way to express himself artistically and that acting was a way of doing that. It certainly seems to have been the right career choice: "I am very happy I left the shipping," he said.

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Gerard Byrne playing Walter Sorrow in Drum Belly by Richard Dormer. Photography: Anthony Woods

Bob Kelly, Gerard Byrne, Emmet Kirwan and Charlotte McCurry in the Abbey Theatre production of Oscar Wilde's THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY, adapted and directed by Neil Bartlett. Photography: Ros Kavanagh.



Following the appointment of its Development Officer, Margaret Broome, Music Generation Offaly/ Westmeath is working hard to be ready for the new academic year.



Margaret Broome

Music Generation Offaly/Westmeath... strumming to the future

Music Generation Offaly/ Westmeath is led in partnership by Offaly and Westmeath County Councils, and is part of Music Generation, a national programme for music education initiated by Music Network with seed funding from U2 and the Ireland Funds.

Margaret Broome joins Music Generation Offaly/Westmeath having previously held posts as a Principal Teacher of music in Fife, Scotland and as a performance tutor (voice and piano) at NUI Maynooth. Originally from Edinburgh, Scotland, Margaret is a graduate of The Royal Scottish Academy of Music, Glasgow (B.Ed (music), piano and education), and from the University of York, England (M.A (music), performance and education). Margaret brings substantial and varied experience of music education in a number of contexts to Music Generation Offaly/Westmeath, a project which will widen access to music education for children across the two counties over the next 3 years.

Already underway in 8 other counties across the country, including Laois, Music Generation is extending opportunities for children and young people to be able to participate in high quality performance music education in their locality.

During 2013/2014, Music Generation Offaly/ Westmeath will focus on the

establishment of the first strand of its ambitious 3 strand project, The Early Years Kodály Programme.

SO WHAT IS THE KODÁLY WAY? (pronounced 'Co-dye-ae')

Approaching music education through Kodály will allow for the creation of a programme that uses singing as its main method of teaching because singing is one of the most natural, participative and enjoyable ways to make music. This way, children learn about music through 'doing'. Music Generation Offaly/ Westmeath have designed The Early Years Kodály Programme to be a school based music education programme, delivered to whole classes by tutors supported by class teachers. Over the next 3 years, the programme will be extended and offered to more schools interested in joining 'the singing revolution'.

Initially working with classes from Junior Infants to 3rd class, tutors will develop programmes that emphasize singing, and that will, over time, allow school participation to evolve into area and county choirs providing youngsters with new musical opportunities and experiences.

Now schools are being invited to join with Music Generation Offaly/ Westmeath in the introduction of The Early Years Kodály Programme which will be the first step towards widening

access to music education across the two counties for all children, when tutors begin visiting them in October.

One participating school principal said: *"We are very excited to get the opportunity to participate in this project and are looking forward to 'making music education happen'.... The Early Years Kodály Programme sounds like a fantastic programme and I have no doubt that it (will) complement our Music Programme. The other important feature of the programme is the opportunity for teachers to get involved and learn new methods and skills which will enhance the teaching of music in the years ahead".*

The music community will benefit from involvement in this project too, as The Early Years Kodály Programme will not only provide new work opportunities for talented musicians, but also allow for the development of new skills through partnership with DIT, The Kodály Society of Ireland and Athlone Education Centre.

Margaret Broome, Music Generation Offaly/ Westmeath's Development Officer has been overwhelmed by the positive responses received so far: *"...to get the chance to talk with Principals and musicians, and explain what it is that we will be doing, has been great, especially when everyone*

I've spoken too is so enthusiastic and interested. Our timeline is very tight, but we are currently in touch with 25 schools across Offaly and Westmeath that we hope to be working in by October. But we haven't forgotten all the other primary schools out there looking to get involved with Music Generation Offaly/ Westmeath. Together with our partners in Athlone Education Centre, we are developing ways of engaging with them too.

Planning is well underway with our partners at DIT Conservatory of Music and Drama, and the Kodály Society of Ireland, our training partners in The Early Years Kodály Programme who will provide professional development for the musicians who will become our Music Education Practitioners.

And as for all the fantastic musicians who have been working all over Offaly and Westmeath for years, Music Generation Offaly/ Westmeath is looking forward to working and developing new ideas with them. It's going to be a busy year!"

For more information on the project, Margaret Broome can be contacted on Tel: 057 9346898 or mbroome@offalycoco.ie or follow Music Generation Offaly/Westmeath on Facebook for regular updates.

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On the set of the short film DTA



In the Can (but not in the Cannes)

Jonathan Sheehan a filmmaker, writer, director and stand up artist from Tullamore, writes about ‘getting it in the can’ and the on-set and offline learning experience of his first film.

On August 2011, I finished the last day (of a two day shoot) filming my short film *DTA*. It had been goal of mine to make a film since I was a kid. At twenty seven years old I finally did it!

However, the experience wasn't what I thought it would be. The two days of shooting had not gone as smoothly as I hoped. Every page of the script had been shot, which is a success in itself, but certain things did not come off as well as I hoped and little did I know the long road ahead to finish the film.

DTA is a short 10 minute film about a young guy called Garth who falls in love with a girl he meets online called Astrid. She lives in terror of upsetting her father, who doesn't want her to have a life because he fears he will lose her, like he did her mother. The film tells the story of how they meet face to face for the first time, when they begin to fall in love with each other and how they deal with Astrid's father.

The film was shot HD mini-tape and I misjudged how difficult it would be to edit. Not having the right equipment or the money (or know-how), I was dependent on finding an editor who was willing to work basically for free. This was hard to find!

Many people said they would/could but in the end they didn't come through, (one even lied for six months, telling me he was working on it, when in reality he did nothing). After a year and half of looking for help, salvation came in the form of Kenny Gaughan, the Galway based stand-up comedian who very kindly offered to edit the film for me. Kenny cut through a lot of the footage that wasn't working and made a film that belies the difficulty in making it. Almost two years after shooting, in April 2013 I finally saw *DTA*!

In hindsight, I think pre and during production I was personally well prepared,

perhaps I expected the same level of 'preparation' from the cast and crew. My expectations were actually quite low. I just wanted to make a film and be able to show it to people and for it to look OK.

In retrospect, some of the crew had higher expectations than me, maybe even higher expectations of themselves, but that's OK, we all have different learning curves when starting out.

In post production, I didn't see it coming, how hard it would be to get it finished.

I really thought it wouldn't take so long or be so hard. In the end, I'm just glad it's done and looking at it honestly I think it's OK. But I don't think it lives' up to what I wanted and the long journey to completion took some of the fun out of it.


Disappointed but wiser

I might sound a bit downbeat about the whole thing, it was disappointing, but hopefully I'm wiser as a result! I would still encourage anyone to make their own film, but prepare for an up-hill battle.

I think these are the trials everyone goes through on their first film and I am optimistic about making more; hopefully the next time the process will be faster and

smoother. I am working on a 2 min short with some friends; it will be shot on a home video camera which I will edit myself.

For those wondering what *DTA* stands for, well, you will have to watch the film to find out. You can judge it for yourself. On YouTube, type in **D.T.A Short Irish Film** and see what you think.

Jonathan Sheehan is writer/director and stand up artist. You can contact him on offalycomedyevent@yahoo.ie 

“I was dependent on finding an editor who was willing to work for free. That was hard to find!”



Smock Alley Trip


Laois Youth Theatre Open Call

Where: Dunamaise Arts Centre

When: Saturday, October 5 11am-1pm

Why not come along and meet current members and leaders and find out all about Laois Youth Theatre?

Explore drama through theatre games, get creative, learn about production processes; onstage, backstage and technical, while having fun, gaining confidence and making new friends. New members always welcome.

Book now as places are limited for the theatre workshops which are designed for ages 12-18. Laois Youth Theatre Workshops are run in Portlaoise, Stradbally and Portarlington throughout the school term from October to December and February to June for just €60 per term. **For further information contact the Arts Office at Laois County Council on Tel: 057 8664033/13** 

Eileen Coghlan



Who is?

Eileen Coghlan

by TP O'Gorman

If you find yourself asking this question then maybe this piece can provide the answer. If you were born before 1980 and attended your local national school in Ireland it's very likely that you have spent quite an amount of time looking at her work but not having any knowledge as to who she was or anything about her.

You see, Eileen Coghlan illustrated many of the schoolbooks used predominantly in Irish primary schools, but also less so in Secondary Schools, during the 40's, 50's, 60's, 70's and even into the 80's.

Her illustrations were used in English readers, Irish readers and workbooks, history and poetry books and given that we all went to primary school then it's unlikely you didn't at some stage see her illustrations and maybe ponder on their content or daydream about being part of the action.

"Miss Coghlan's forte is the drawing of babies; every child in her collection is immensely attractive. Her adult portraits are good also."

The Irish Times

Signing herself Eileen Coghlan, Eibhlin Ni Chochlain or more commonly EC, those illustrations served to brighten up many a dreary lesson or story and perhaps gave rise to many a discussion about a historical character, hero or heroine or happening at home or in the

farm, village or parish with which so many of us from those decades are so familiar.

Eileen was born in Kilbeggan on May 18, 1909 to parents William Coghlan, one of the local tailors and Mary Coghlan (nee McClelland). Typical of the time Eileen came from a large family; she had three sisters, Mary, Una, Josephine and five brothers Michael, Des, Gerald, John, Fergus and Dermot.

She went to the local Convent Primary School and then to secondary school and from there to the Dublin Metropolitan School of Art where she studied her craft for a short time in the company of other greats in the pantheon of Irish art of the early 20th century.

Eileen devoted herself early in her career to commercial art in an obvious need to fund her move to Dublin and later concentrated almost exclusively on book illustration, particularly children's books and schoolbooks for the Dublin based Browne and Nolan Ltd, The Educational Company of Ireland, Fallons and prior to her retirement Folens Publishers.

But, Eileen also carved out a niche for herself as the illustrator of dust jackets for many of the important authors of the time, among the more noted examples being *Paradise Alley* by John D Sheridan and *Statue for a Square* by Francis McManus.

She also provided the illustrations for a

series of three much praised children's books written by Longford author and primary teacher Mary Flynn all based on the character Cornelius Rabbit in 1944/45.

Among the many important children's authors whose books were illustrated by Eileen as EC, were Patricia Lynch (*Strangers at the Fair* and *The Turf Cutter's Donkey Kicks up his Heels*), Maura Laverty (*The Cottage in the Bog*) and Eileen O' Faolain (*Miss Pennyfeather* and *the Pooka*).

Sinead De Valera had four of her very popular children's books illustrated by EC in the 50's, namely, *The Magic Girdle and other stories*, *The Emerald Ring and other stories*, *The Four-Leafed Shamrock and other tales* and finally *Fairy Tales*.

At that time resident in Dublin, Eileen joined the Water Colour Society of Ireland and exhibited her work through them. She also contributed the odd cartoon to the *Dublin Opinion* and also her illustrated articles appeared in the *Irish Digest*. In the 1960's she penned a weekly-illustrated topical and generally witty article to the much beloved *Irish Press*.

All the while she was also painting portraits, landscapes, towns and country scenes. An art critic writing in the *Irish Independent* in 1936 wrote describing her first exhibition of watercolours and drawings in the Country Shop Gallery, St Stephen's Green: *"It is a simple, unpretentious collection, but the*

workmanship is good and the drawing excellent. Miss Coghlan's forte is the drawing of babies; every child in her collection is immensely attractive. Her adult portraits are good also. She has a nice sense of composition and no mean painter of light."

Four of her watercolours are proudly on show in Kilbeggan Library and one in Athlone Library while more of her work is in private ownership. Eileen continued to paint and illustrate until ill health intervened in her latter years.

She died following a short illness at Midland General Hospital, Tullamore, county Offaly on Good Friday, April 13, 1990 (I'm sure Eileen would have a wry smile at that one) and was buried in Kilbeggan Cemetery on Easter Sunday (Cornelius Rabbit playing a part there maybe!)

Her outstanding legacy is I think undoubtedly the volume of children's work created for primary school books and browsing through those illustrations brings back many a happy memory from schooldays past.

What can be said is that Eileen Coghlan is a true creative national treasure and has left quite the colourful and nostalgic legacy behind her, never to be forgotten.

If you would like more information or have an interest in Eileen Coghlan please contact Westmeath Arts Office on arts@westmeathcoco.ie

Literary Awards acknowledge talented Longford writers

by Patrick Conboy

The first ever Longford Leader Literary Awards were held on June 27 to coincide with the *Writers Love Longford* aspect of the successful Love Longford festival.

There was an enthusiastic response to the call for entries from poets and writers from right across the region and a large group of them were present at the Longford Arms Hotel for the occasion.

The County's Arts Officer, Fergus Kennedy, got proceedings underway, while there were also introductions from local town councillor Gerry Warnock, one of the main organisers of Love Longford, and the Editor of the Longford Leader, Sheila Reilly.

Also present at the event was local author Alan McMonagle, who was given the unenviable task of choosing the winners from the impressively large number of entries. Before making the big announcement, Mr McMonagle was invited to read



Gerry Warnock, Alan McMonagle, Rose Beirne, Sheila Reilly, Fergus Kennedy
Photo by Shelley Corcoran

an extract from his latest book of short stories *Psychotic Episodes*.

The award for Best Poem was presented to Mary Melvin Geoghegan for her composition, *The Geography of a Writer*, while *The Return Visit* by Rose Byrne was chosen as the winner in the Best Prose category. Both writers received plaques to mark their success, with the presentations being made by Sheila.

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Some of the Team Castle volunteers taking in the beautiful views of Athlone.



Westmeath Volunteers Injecting Magic into The Midlands

Midlands Arts and Culture Magazine speaks to Ian O'Flynn, Manager of Westmeath Volunteer Centre about the fun and friendships formed by those who get involved in the arts world in Westmeath.

"Managing Westmeath Volunteer Centre is a pleasure. Each and every day we meet wonderful people brimming with skills and enthusiasm and finding them a worthwhile volunteering opportunity is something we hold very dear," enthused Ian.

"The opportunity to work with organisations who promote the arts in Westmeath was something that Westmeath Volunteer Centre jumped at."

Perhaps given Ian's artistic pedigree such enthusiasm is not a surprise. "I came from a theatrical background what with my mother being a playwright and my father managing the opera house in Cork and so it was more or less in my blood.

"Growing up, volunteering was a given thing, although, back then, it wasn't

called volunteering, it was just based on the willingness to help and the passion for the arts. Lifelong friends with widely ranging backgrounds, skills and passions were made and some went on to thread the boards on big stages," continued Ian.

Ian highlighted the opportunity of working with other branches of the arts in the volunteer centre such as Athlone Art & Heritage to advise on Volunteer Management.

"Through this we have been able to find matches between our volunteers and opportunities within Athlone Art & Heritage such as the Artists Studio, the Luan Gallery, Hilltown Festival, Mullingart, Charleville Castle and, of course, Athlone Castle.

"The staff in Athlone Arts & Heritage are exceptional with the volunteers and we

in the Volunteer Centre would use them as a good role model when explaining best practice to other not for profit organisations who are looking for volunteers."

Ian was also keen to stress that anyone with a passion or interest in the Arts can make for a good volunteer. "One interesting thing I have always found was that volunteers do not need to be a Picasso or Oscar winning actors to be involved in the arts. Volunteering is about passion and the Volunteer Centre's role when dealing with the volunteers is to find the passion within and help the volunteer with options about roles."

"Being involved in the arts is an uplifting and inspiring experience. From helping children to discover colour, to helping an actor to learn their lines, to sharing the emotion and passion of a piece of art in

a gallery, to stewarding at an event keeping everyone safe, all of these roles make a big difference and also uplifts the soul.

"Many of the volunteers I have met through the arts had no idea when they began their volunteering journey that they would fall in love with the arts as much as they did. The arts, craic agus ceol are an integral part of our society and the more we can all help to promote it, the better our land will be."

Volunteers are essential to the Arts and without them many initiatives would fall by the wayside. As Ian pointed out: "In the Midlands there are many art galleries, artist's collectives, theatres, drama groups, poetry and spoken word, photography societies and many, many more arts inspired associations that, without volunteers would not exist."

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Music Network in association with The Arts Office, Laois County Council presents Bridge, Bellows and Bow with Liam O'Connor, fiddle, viola; Caoimhín O' Fearghail, uilleann pipes, flute, guitar, vocals and Noel Hill in the wonderful surroundings of Emo Court, Emo, Portlaoise, Co Laois on Monday, September 16.



Bridge, Bellows and Bow with Noel Hill, Caoimhín O' Fearghail and Liam O'Connor

Bridge, Bellows and Bow for Emo

"Breathtaking... a young musician who is essentially standing on the shoulders of giants, but who has worked his way through these influences and created something of his own," said Dermot McLaughlin in the Journal of Music in Ireland on Liam O'Connor.

Similarly, PJ Curtis said of Noel Hill: "Here we have a stylist who has taken his instrument to new heights... Noel shapes each tune as a finely sculpted piece of intricate musical art, delicacy and beauty."

Spanning three generations, Liam, Noel and Caoimhín – all TG4 Gradam Ceoil

winners – are united by a deep knowledge and love for the music of the legendary masters of Irish tradition such as Coleman, Ennis, Clancy, Potts and Tóibín.

For this tour, these three stellar soloists are sure to delight trad fans with their fresh, vibrant take on the classic Irish traditional music repertoire, as well as digging deep into the vaults to unearth some lesser-known melodies from manuscript sources.

Expect to hear everything from powerful dance music, lively jigs and melancholic hornpipes to poignant Gaelic slow airs

and sean nós songs. Thanks in no small measure to multi-instrumentalist Ó Fearghail, there's also a wide range of sounds and instrumentation to drink in: with fiddle, viola, concertina, uilleann pipes, flute, guitar and singing in various combinations – all laced with a healthy dose of folklore, personal anecdotes and a splash of good humour.

Group workshops in the uilleann pipes, fiddle and Concertina led by the performers will take place on Monday 16 from 5.30pm to 7pm in Emo. When booking a workshop, please state clearly the instrument required and give a name and contact number.

The workshops are supported by Music Generation Laois.

Concert/Workshop tickets are now on sale from the box office at the Dunamase Arts Centre on Tel: 057 8663355.

Concert Tickets cost €15/€12 and Workshop Tickets are €12 and include free admission to Concert. Advance booking is essential.

For more information about the event contact: The Arts Office, Laois County Council. Tel: 057 8664033/13.

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DINNER OFFER

Make an evening of it by booking a pre-concert four course dinner at Emo Tea rooms, Emo Court for €24.00. To book call: 057 8633964

There's Something about Shinrone

A short film about Shinrone has just been completed under Offaly County Council's Per Cent for Art scheme with a free DVD available to the public.

Written and directed by Steven Goldsmith the short film touches on what Shinrone is renowned for - its 1960's RTE documentaries, concerts by Arlo Guthrie, The Waterboys and Nancy Griffith and, of course, the infamous Barack Obama connection whose Kearney ancestors are buried locally. However, the story the film tells is that despite these recognised incidental connections, what makes Shinrone special are the people who call it home.

The idea of making a film with the fund came about following a public meeting when people recalled the RTÉ documentary about Shinrone 45 years previously and thought it might be a good starting point to make a film about Shinrone today. Importantly, everyone was keen to ensure that, however the fund was spent that it would involve many people in the community and have a far-reaching impact, particularly for those not living in the area anymore.

Steven expanded: "This was not meant to be another documentary but rather an exploration of the deeper heart of the Shinrone community, asking the

question, 'What makes Shinrone special?' I hope the film will be passed around the families, and over time dusted off and reminisced over.

"Who knows, in 45 years time, maybe another filmmaker will come across it and revisit Shinrone on film again!

The free DVD of the film is available in the local Centra or through Offaly County Arts Office. Tel: 057 9357400.

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New Legends *from* Old Woods

Sisters and artists Tina and Yvonne Claffey, were awarded the commission to create artworks as part of the Per Cent for art scheme for Crinkle National School, Birr following the completion of their extension.

Speaking of the opportunity Tina said: "It was an absolute honour for us both to be chosen and all the more special that we both have children attending the school.

"Once our proposal was accepted and the project was under way (October 2012), we completed the works for the official opening in April 2013. We were both inspired by the translation of Crinkle-meaning

Old Woods in ancient Irish. However we both interpreted the subject in different ways, which complemented one another."

M

YVONNE CLAFFEY

"I decided to have ceramic workshops with each class to show them what the whole process of working with clay is about. I explained the process from pressing it, moulding it, stamping it, and adding to it and firing in the kiln to a temperature of 950C degrees, in a process called bisque firing. It is then glazed and fired again to a higher temperature of 1060C degrees to give the clay its high gloss sheen.

"All the students and staff members in Crinkle created their own tile stamping into it and adding on to it in relief. The large ceramic panel 'Sli an Eolais' (Pathway of Learning), was inspired by the old Irish meaning of Crinkle - Crion Choill meaning Old Woods. The pathway going through the wood represents the pathway or journey of learning.

There are eight trees along the pathway representing the eight years of Primary Education. The panel openly invites you onto the path which gives the illusion of perspective and distance. The journey does not end here but continues on throughout a lifetime of learning."

Yvonne Claffey
Sli an Eolais - Crinkle National School



Tina Claffey
LED Light - Crinkle National School

TINA CLAFFEY

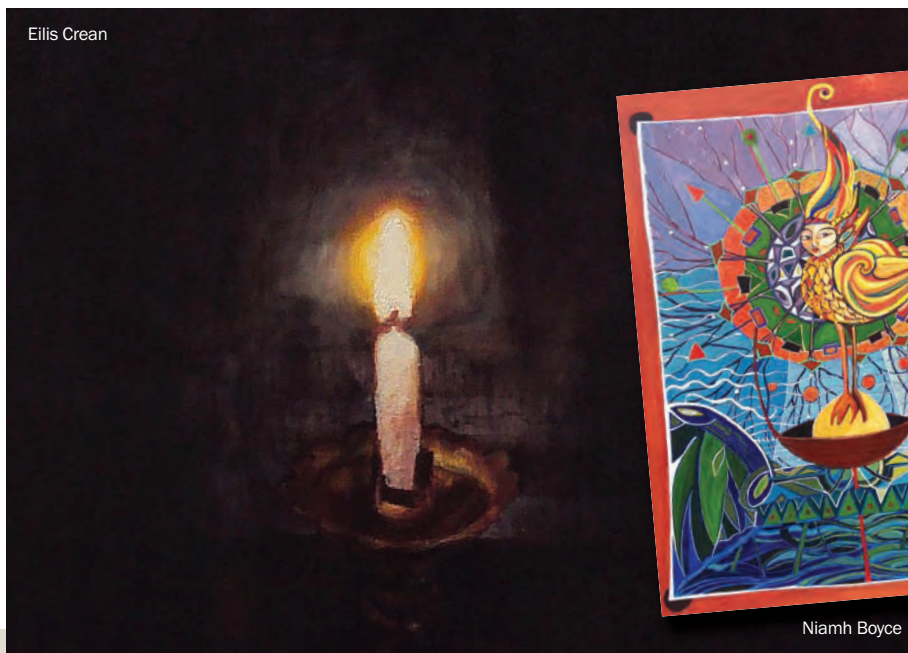
"Inspired by the theme Old Wood, I decided to base my photography on trees from the surrounding area, using the images as a metaphor for positive affirmations for the children.

"I have always thought that the happiness of your life depends on the quality of your thoughts, based on the theory that whatever we think about ourselves, the body responds; whatever we believe in ourselves – it usually manifests. Children respond so well to positive comments. They thrive in positive atmospheres.

"Each class had an affirmation to work on, and I chose texts that the children created with crayon, to incorporate their affirmation into the image.

"There are five pieces in total; four are A1 images framed behind acrylic, with one large photographic Led light panel 5ft x 3ft."

Writer Ann Egan speaks with Angela Delaney, Artist and Clinical Nurse Specialist (CNS) in Art Therapy Interventions in the HSE Mental Health Services and Curator of, Let's Connect Art Exhibition.



Ellis Crean

Niamh Boyce

ANGELA TALKS ABOUT HER WORK

“As a CNS in Art Therapy Interventions, I work with a great team in the Rehabilitation Service, while also supporting the Acute Psychiatric Service and Community Care. One important area is working directly to encourage and support people who experience mental health problems, use their strengths and interests in art as a tool in their recovery.

“Art is not for everyone and is part of a package of care offered. The process of creating is important and not all the art produced is for exhibition. Some of these artists desire to exhibit and sell their art like regular artists but due to circumstances, have difficulty accessing exhibiting opportunities.

“Another aspect of my work is advocacy. This involves collaborating with organisations in our community who can support these artists such as the local arts office, galleries, county councils and voluntary and statutory agencies.

“As citizens these artists should have the same rights as everyone else. Exhibiting alongside other artists promotes socialisation and helps remove some of the stigma around mental illness that continues to exist but thankfully is changing.

“Art has played a role in this change. There are many studies that show the creation of art, and participating in art programmes helped to facilitate internal changes of recovery and acceptance in the wider community.

“The individual experiencing mental health problems moves beyond the label of their psychiatric diagnosis to their identity as an artist. Producing art can give a sense of worth and value. Because art originates in many places and intersects different areas of our lives, it has the potential to break down the stigma around mental illness.”

Let's Connect

During Laois Mental Health Awareness Week

From September 5 to October 5, Angela Delaney, Artist and Clinical Nurse Specialist (CNS) in Art Therapy Interventions in the HSE Mental Health Services, will curate, *Let's Connect* - an exhibition of artwork by artists exploring how visual art intersects and contributes to health and wellbeing - in the Dunamais Arts Centre.

This exhibition will form part of Laois Mental Health Awareness Week. Laois Community Forum is a collaborative group which consists of a number of partners including the HSE; Laois Sports Partnership; Mental Health Ireland; SHINE; GROW; Laois County Council; Laois Partnership Company and Laois VEC. It highlights the importance of taking care of mental health, through engaging with each other and participation in activities in the local community.

There are significant connections between art and mental health. Art can play an important role in shaping ideas.

It can also provide a strong medium to communicate for people who otherwise struggle to engage with society. Art is filled with meaning that goes beyond the visual surface of the art object. While art intersects and contributes to wellbeing, it offers meaning not just for the individual making it, but also for a society.

By exhibiting artwork by people from different backgrounds such as artists and mental health service users, it

provides an opportunity to normalise the experience and prevent stigmatisation and exclusion of people who may experience mental health difficulties. *Let's Connect* offers a platform to explore some of these ideas.

Artists from all different disciplines responded to Angela's brief for artwork that explored a personal response to the links between Art and Mental Health. Some are established international artists and others are first time exhibitors. There are contributions from artists working in the area of Art Therapy or Community Arts.

Angela says: “In my role as a CNS, I've been privileged to support and work with some amazing service user artists whose art speaks personally of their mental health concerns. The validity of this work is on a par with any other artwork I have curated and I am delighted that some of these artists will also contribute to the show.

“I'm very excited about creating new work for the show. It offers me an opportunity to reflect on and respond to the influences that my clinical work has had on my personal artwork. It has opened up new avenues of exploration for me as an artist.”

Art plays a very important role in life with Angela explaining that for some people it's inseparable. But art is a very subjective experience. It can be fun, a great source of enjoyment, a

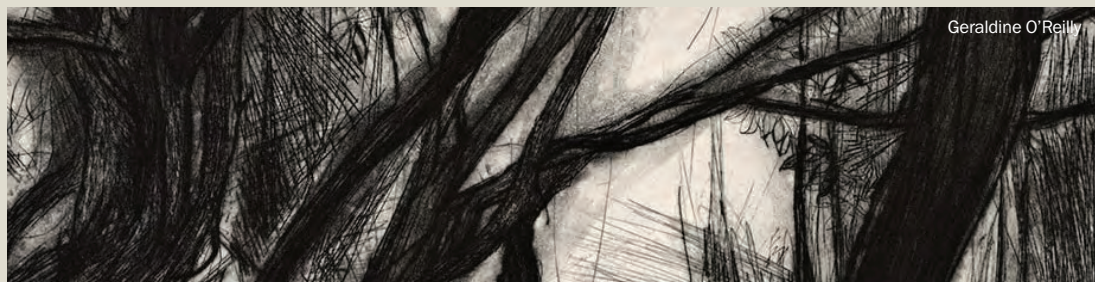
medium to communicate ideas or stir memories.

Art is useful in developing creative problem-solving through experimenting with materials, because the artist can explore and create new realities. Creating art can increase self-confidence and improve our self-esteem. For some people experiencing mental health difficulties, art can open pathways for opportunities and pierce through the stigma that continues to exist around mental health problems. What makes a great piece of artwork is its ability to communicate with the viewer - it's that moment when the penny drops! Sometimes it's the lovely aftertaste of an image that lingers.

“With any exhibition you hope for a large audience,” added Angela. “Art needs to be experienced and engaged with to bring it to life. People come to art with their personal histories and experiences and that influences their perceptions. But I hope people will come to the exhibition with an open mind. For some people, the stigma of mental health is greater than the mental illness itself. I don't want the exhibition to be about people who have a mental health history or about professional artists who are showing internationally but about artwork that helps us feel connected.

“By exhibiting all the 'artists' work together in a professional gallery space like the Dunamais Arts Centre, you destigmatise the artwork.”

M



Geraldine O'Reilly

The trumpet section of the Mullingar Town Band as they took part in the World Music Contest in Kerkrade, Holland in recent time



Greg Mimmagh Dunne and Caroline Oakes of the Drum Section after the Showband Marching competition



Greg Mimmagh Dunne and Caroline Oakes of the Drum The band gathered around in the car park along with their director Hubert Magee and conductor for the concert competition Harry Kelly, as they read out the judges comments from the concert band competition - from the smiling faces, the comments were not too bad!

MULLINGAR TOWN BAND

Scoop Silver and Bronze at World Music Contest

The past year has been hectic for the members and committee of the Mullingar Town Band as it prepared for a world music contest, and came home with medals.

Back in August 2012 the band decided it would make the trip to the World Music Contest in Kerkrade, Holland for July 2013 and from then preparation began.

It was a year of big thinking for the band, which decided to base its 2013 Summer Marching Show on *The Gathering* – a national campaign encouraging Irish diaspora to visit the country at some point during the year.

Each year the band prepares a show for a series of marching competitions run by the Irish Marching Bands Association and Drum Corp Europe. Six to eight bands generally take part in these competitions and both associations judge them.

The Mullingar Town Band's show *The Gathering* includes music by John Williams from the film *Far and Away*, U2's *Beautiful Day*, the song *Sinead O Connor* brought to number 1, *Nothing Compares to You* and a snippet of *The Spanish Lady Dance*. In what took hours of planning and execution, Eoin O'Keefe arranged Music for the show especially for the Mullingar Town Band; Remco Groenewegen arranged the percussion and the drill/marching design was written by Jon Bilby.

COMPETITION RESULTS

In Arklow on July 6, the Mullingar Town Band came second place and won 'Best Band' on parade after the show competition.

The next competition was to be on the European stage two weeks later and to prepare for this prestigious event the band invited back American Band Instructor, Ed Otto - Director of Downingtown University Band,



Mullingar Town Band had a fantastic welcoming committee awaiting their arrival home after their great achievements at the World Music Contest in Holland

Pennsylvania. Ed has been coming to Mullingar to do Band Camps since 1990. However it had been five years since Ed worked with the band. For four days, the band members practiced hard, attending camp from 10am to 7pm. The band then had a few days to practice what they learned from camp before heading off to Holland bright and early on Thursday, July 18.

During their time in Kerkrade, the band stayed in school hall accommodation where they lived for three days during the World Music Contest. The band competed in the Show Band competition on Saturday afternoon and came away with a Bronze Award.

Their work wasn't finished just yet as they competed again on Sunday afternoon in the Concert Band section, playing the test piece *Seventh Suite for Band* by Alfred Reed and *The Four Nobel Truths* by Philip Sparke. From this, the team took a well-earned Silver Award – and finally everyone could relax.

TIME OFF

On Sunday evening the band members packed their bags and headed up to Utrecht where they were going to spend the next three nights on vacation visiting Walibi World Theme Park.

On Tuesday, they visited Amsterdam and then drove to the small village of Oosthuizen 30 minutes away where they stayed on their first trip abroad to the Pumerend Band Festival in 1974 and every four years after that until a decade ago. After spending the day in hot Amsterdam, the band members were delighted to hop in for a relaxing swim and some water games in the warm waters of the IJsselmeer or locally known as the Dike near Oosthuizen.

The journey continued on Wednesday when the band caught the ferry in Rotterdam and then visited the heritage town of Volendam and the famous village of Edam.

When everyone was back on the bus, they were truly worn out and ready for home!

The bus departed from Rotterdam port on Wednesday evening at 8.45 pm and arrived in Mullingar almost 24 hours later to a surprise party organised by parents and committee members.

Members of the band said that this trip would not have happened without the support of the people and businesses of Mullingar and Westmeath who they were very grateful to.

As always, the band will be recruiting in September and this will be advertised in local newspapers as well as the band's social media.

For more information, visit Web: www.mullingartownband.ie or see Facebook page Mullingar Town Band - Celtic Crusaders or Tel: 086 1999497.



LAOIS ARTS OFFICE: Summer Arts Programme 2013

Laois Summer Arts Programme featured a busy 5 weeks of workshops in dance, pottery, creative writing, drawing and painting with artists Erica Borges, Finn O'Hara, Siobahn Keogh, Conor Brennan, Ann Egan, Orla McDonagh and Stefanie Bruning. For more information or to register your name for the 2014 Summer Arts Programme contact the Laois Arts Office Tel: 057 8664033/13 • Email: artsoff@laoiscoco.ie • Web: www.laois.ie **M**



Luan Gallery Showcases Music and Visual Arts and Scoops Major Award

As discussed in our previous Issue, the Luan Gallery in Athlone was opened to a great start. The pace has not slowed down for the gallery as it has been a busy few months in Luan Gallery between new exhibitions, workshops, heritage lectures, portfolio course, summer camps, weddings and a recital.

And, it seems apt that the Luan Gallery has been recognised as an artistic winner for and of itself when named

Best Cultural Building in the Irish Architecture awards by the Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland (RIAI).

The award was presented to the Luan's architect Keith Williams, founder and design director of Keith Williams Architects, by Minister for Education and Skills Ruairi Quinn and Michelle Fagan, president of the RIAI, at Dublin's City Hall recently.

There have been a series of different events and exhibitions in the gallery over the last couple of months. An Luan Gallery's spring exhibition programme was firmly grounded in the work of artists and projects from the Midlands.

Such as *Engaged* which was a group



exhibition comprised of work by artists who have completed residencies in the gallery's sister venue Abbey Road Artists' Studios.

The second part of the March-May programme was *A Very Grand Canal*, a collection of artistic responses to the Grand Canal in county Offaly including work by regional artists

Following on from the success of workshops *A Grand Series* in April, *A Print Series* turned focus to printing techniques and processes. Featuring practical print workshops facilitated by current studio members Claire Henderson and Niamh Flanagan, the technicalities and products of monoprints and dry point were explored and received great feedback.

Meanwhile in June, the gallery celebrated National Music Day – and where better to celebrate such a day

than in Athlone, the birth place of John McCormack, and enjoy a recital of Count's songs with a local baritone Darren O'Hara.

It's looking set to continue to be another busy couple of months for the gallery with upcoming shows include two exhibitions, one from the beneficiaries of The RDS Student Art Awards, second from James Hanley, a mainly portraiture painter. The RDS Student Art Awards Exhibition represents the fine arts with works in painting, sculpture, drawing, and printmaking to name but a few.

To broaden exposure for the prizewinners, the RDS organises the annual RDS Student Art Awards Travelling Exhibition which sees the works tour regional venues throughout the country and the Luan Gallery was chosen to be one of the hosts this year. **M**



View of Athlone Castle keep and entrance to new visitor centre



Some of the soldiers who fought here during the 1691 Siege on display in People of the Siege



Joanna Grobosz (Guide), Victor Ambrus (Illustrator), Mary Bannon (Guide) at one of Victor's illustrations.

ATHLONE CASTLE

Attracting Visitors from Across the Globe

Mary Bannon brings the past to life by taking us through some of the highlights of Athlone Castle.

Athlone Castle is firmly establishing itself on the cultural tourism path with celebrity visitors Steve Peacocke better known as Brax from Home and Away and Irish actor Eamon Morrissey, (known most recently for his role in Fair City) recently popping in to take a look.

Perhaps it's not surprising that the castle would peak their interest as the new visitor centre is attracting the crowds in their droves with tourists coming not just from local counties but from all across the country - and across the globe.

Athlone Castle Visitor Centre now boasts eight new exhibition spaces and a beautifully renovated courtyard as well as spectacular views of Athlone and the River Shannon from various viewing areas inside and out.

The story unfolds for the visitor through a mix of audio-visual, interactive games and information points, a 360oexperience of the Siege of Athlone in 1691, figures from the siege made from recycled materials, vivid illustrations as well as countless

artefacts that reflect the depth of history in Athlone down through the centuries.

EACH ROOM TELLS ITS STORY IN A UNIQUE WAY:
The *Early Settlement in Athlone* has a fantastic 3D interactive map of Ireland that explains the five early periods of settlement at Athlone through a variety of audio and visual displays, with artefacts from early settlers on display.

The *Athlone Castle's first 400 years* space tells the story of the early development of the castle. Visitors can test their strength as a medieval soldier by trying their hand at some weapons of the period or 'Build a Castle' through the use of interactive touch screens. Budding soldiers can also attempt to 'Capture the Castle' and survive the attack with as many men as possible remaining!

Upstairs in *Athlone Besieged* you will find vivid illustrations from Victor Ambrus, which depict the fighting that was ongoing between the Jacobite soldiers fighting for King James of England and the Williamite soldiers fighting for King William of Orange. Victor, a renowned illustrator of history, folk tale and animal story books is probably best known for his work on the Channel 4's archaeological show *Time Team* where he visualises how sites under excavation might once have looked.

Next door in *Siege 360* the story continues placing the visitor at the

heart of the great Siege of Athlone, demonstrating the fighting and the role the castle played. A short film playing all around the circular room with 4D layering surrounds the visitor.

Then, meet eight life size figures of soldiers from both sides in full army dress with weaponry created by specialist art and design company *Windsor Workshop* whose artists have been prop and model maker on films such as Harry Potter, Star Wars, James Bond and Charlie and the Chocolate Factory. Recyclable materials including steel, wood, resin, wire mesh and foamex were used as much as possible.

The last room, *The Fabric of Athlone*, highlights the aftermath of the siege in the town and goes on to deal with Athlone's military history, trade, commerce, politics and religion over recent centuries. Military uniforms are showcased and are explained through an interactive experience. Local World War memorabilia is also on display. A 3D timeline along the wall highlights different events throughout Athlone's history. Items on display include a sample of Athlone tweed and an Athlone Woollen Mills brass plate. Short video clips highlight interesting events that occurred in Athlone including the British Army leaving Athlone in 1922 with Séan Mac Eoin raising the tricolour at the castle, Athlone Flooding and highlights of the Athlone verses AC Milan game in 1975.

The final two rooms are located in the courtyard of the castle - the first in the

Lower Keep. This circular room displays a range of implements, tools and household items that reflect life in the town. The Old Athlone Society and local brothers Cecil and N.W. (Billy) English (RIP) are to be credited with the provision of many of the artefacts on display throughout the castle. In fact, during the summer the brothers were commemorated with the unveiling of a plaque by Mayor of Athlone Jim Henson in the Lower Keep in honour thof their contribution.

Death and Destruction marks the final room. It is dimly lit and reflects the challenges faced by Athlonians directly after the siege in 1691 who faced disease and a grim future. Athlone Art and Heritage Ltd runs of Athlone Castle Visitor Centre, the Luan Gallery and the Abbey Road Artists' Studios. **M**

- ALSO AT ATHLONE CASTLE VISITOR CENTRE:**
- Tea/Coffee & Refreshments
 - Children's colouring in activities
 - Educational Programme
 - School Tours
 - Group Bookings (on request)
 - Athlone Castle handling collection
 - Temporary Exhibitions
 - Lectures and Demonstrations
 - Evening receptions
 - Wedding Photography (by pre-arrangement only)



Have your story covered...

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

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I.F. O.N.L.Y. 2013

Celebrating Female Dance Makers Between Tradition and Innovation

I.F. O.N.L.Y. the dance festival dedicated to contemporary dance solo authors is delighted to announce the participation of Jean Butler in this year's festival writes Cristina Goletti, Artistic Director of I.F. O.N.L.Y.



The festival was initiated in 2007 as one of Legitimate Bodies Dance Company activities to increase and promote contemporary dance in Offaly and although the company is no longer in residence in Offaly, I.F. O.N.L.Y. remains an important part of the cultural landscape of the county and a successful reality, which owes its success to the unique characteristics of the venue and its community.

This year I.F. O.N.L.Y. celebrates its sixth festival and is entirely dedicated to female dance makers - a courageous choice designed to offer an opportunity for the artists invited as well as the audience to reflect on the role genders play in the contemporary dance scene.

Dance is an interesting example of a male dominated field, most choreographers and successful artists are male, yet is an overtly female profession, with most companies and schools around the world made mostly of females.

But gender is not the only theme of this year's edition. Another important aspect of the 2013 festival is the ability of the artists presented to work between tradition and innovation in a fusion style, which is more and more common in contemporary dance. Some of the artists have been working within the field of traditional dance, like African or Indian classical dance, and recently started to investigate the possibility of re-framing their styles within a more contemporary approach. This will certainly make this year festival a very interesting and thought-provoking one.

All these artists have spent years mastering the necessary skills to become icons within their specific genre, yet they have also been courageous enough to question

and re-examine their forms and present them to the general audience in a different and renew way. Evolving a traditional style, which is usually considered by the rest of the society an important aspect of national culture and pride, is a complex issue, which necessarily stimulates a dialogue with society at large.

One of the best examples of a female dance artist working between tradition and innovation is surely Jean Butler. I.F. O.N.L.Y. is extremely proud to count such an important artist amongst its participant for this year. Her contribution to Irish Dance is well known nationally and internationally. Yet in the past few years she has been investigating a more contemporary approach to her traditional roots. At I.F. O.N.L.Y. she is presenting *hurry*, a new solo in which Butler reconnects with her considerable history and training in Irish Step Dance. A personal and expressive work, offers a resolution to the task of balancing her past and present dancing sensibilities. This work was presented to great acclaim at the 2013 Dublin Dance Festival. Butler will also be the guest of a public talk in Birr Library on Saturday, November 9.

Therefore this year more than ever, the entire community is invited to take part in the several appointments of the festival, from workshops, lectures, performances, screenings and much more. It is yet another attempt of the festival to establish itself in the community that hosts it, foster a frank dialogue about dance, creating the conditions for such festival to become a sustainable artistic reality.

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DETAILS

I.F. O.N.L.Y. International Festival of A Necessarily Lonely You

November 8-9

Birr Theatre and Arts Centre

Birr Public Library and other venues

Performances, Workshops, Screenings, Exhibitions, Public Talks, Residency.

Full program to be released Friday, October 4.

See: www.birrtheatre.com



I.F. O.N.L.Y. Workshop in 2012



MidlandsArts andCultureMagazine

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

