

**MIDLANDS
ARTS AND
CULTURE**

a review
of the
arts in
laois
westmeath
offaly and
Longford

**SPRING
2009**



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Foreword...

What wonderful fun I've had! As guest editor of the autumn 2008 edition of the Midlands Arts and Culture Magazine I asked a wide variety of distinguished Midlanders about their vision and hopes for arts and culture in the Midlands. Now I've been given another opportunity to edit the magazine and I've chosen to focus on young people. With the help of local arts officers in Laois, Longford, Offaly and Westmeath we have un-earthed some of the most insightful, eloquent and opinionated young Midlanders and asked them to share their personal insights into arts in the Midlands. I told them all that their articles could be about anything at all: "anything that inspires or infuriates you, anything that you are passionate about – your experience of arts in the midlands (music, theatre, writing, dance, whatever), or your hopes for arts or youth culture, or some inspirational figure that you've found who is connected with Midlands arts. You can rant or rave, philosophise or share your deepest yearnings and wishes."

I have to admit though, that I may have censored them a little by advising them that "although I mentioned writing about things that infuriated you, I'd rather if these pieces weren't entirely negative, please!"

The consideration and commitment that these young contributors have given this project has been both inspiring and humbling. They've been honest, honourable and upbeat in their appraisal and have laboured to convey ideas in an elegant, eloquent way.

It's been genuinely exciting to sit in my little cottage in Co Westmeath and have these pieces arriving in my inbox. They have a freshness, an honesty and a mint-new determination to them that only the young can offer. We all owe them a debt of gratitude for taking the time and sharing their perspective. They did so, not out of a sense of duty or obligation, but merely a wish to convey their reality to us. For our part we can honour their commitment by redoubling our efforts to put in place the facilities they need to prosper. Rather than bemoaning the lack of opportunities that existed in the arts when we were young let's instead focus on providing the next generation with what they truly need. There will no doubt be cut-backs to the arts in the years ahead, but let's learn from our arch enemy (!) the sports fraternity and begin offering our services voluntarily to young people interested in the arts. In the following pages you'll see just how much young people appreciate these services. It's simply too important now to let slip the gains we've made.

Manchán Magan

Manchán Magan's travel books include *Angels & Rabies* and *Truck Fever*. He writes the *Magan's World* column for the *Irish Times* and presented the *Big Adventure* radio series for RTE. His *Global Nomad* series of television documentaries (for TG4 and Travel Channel) focus on remote cultures of the world, while *No Béarla* looked at the Irish language. He has written for the *Guardian*, *Washington Post* and *LA Times*.

Muireann Ní Chonail
Arts Officer, Laois County Council

Sínead O'Reilly
Arts Officer, Offaly County Council

Martina Finn
Arts Officer, Westmeath County Council

Shane Brennan
Arts Education Officer for the
Midlands Region, Westmeath VEC

Fergus Kennedy
Arts Officer, Longford County Council



NIAMH NÍ RUAIRC (13) attends Scoil Mhuire Secondary School, Longford. Her burning ambition is to visit Iran and explore the ruins of the Persian Empire. Cats are her greatest fear - because they are secretly plotting to take over the Western World and we shall all have to flee to Iran which would cause the ancient monuments to corrode.



DIRTY LITTLE SECRET

AN INSATIABLE FURY

- LONGFORD YOUNG WRITERS GROUP

I have written for years but until three years ago it was a dirty secret, hidden in the back pages of school copies and old notebooks. I was terrified that any of my friends might find out or even worse that I might consider myself a writer. After all, writers are terribly exotic creatures who don't sleep, spend copious amounts of time in obscure coffee houses and have numerous lovers. As a thirteen-year-old living in Longford I ticked none of these boxes. To make matters worse I still didn't have a clue what I could possibly write about or how to go about doing so effectively. I had a vague notion that I should write about being in love or depressed; yet as I was neither, all I achieved were empty verses with a somewhat strained rhyming scheme (every one knew poems had to rhyme!).

I continued like this for a long time. Not knowing how to write but knowing that I had to. I was lucky that Anne Collins, from the local Arts Office approached our school with the offer of a writers group. The first meeting was held in the school library and I was surprised at the attendance. There were fifteen people there - far more than I expected. I had disturbing nightmares of being the only one there! Much to my amazement two of my best friends attended. I had known that both of them were avid readers, but never before imagined that I might not be the only person scribbling bits of poems or scraps of short stories onto hidden pieces of paper.

Our writers group was run on a simple format, one meeting each month, and while it did not suit the needs of each girl it definitely became the highlight of my month. For the first time I was able to show my work to people who understood why I wanted to write and who were prepared to offer helpful criticism. Within two months my writing had undoubtedly improved.

It became clear that most of us had the same problem. We were too heavily influenced by what we thought, or were told, was good writing. Few of us had found our own distinctive voices and how could we? We were all relatively normal fourteen to seventeen year olds who had little experience of the issues our literary heroes dealt with. This was why it was so helpful to have a mentor like Anne. She helped us to realize that writing about the things that we liked or that made our blood boil was more effective than a carefully formed sonnet that had no emotion. Admittedly it was hard at first to hear that one's carefully crafted metaphor made no sense, or that if it takes you three pages to introduce an object it probably doesn't fit there.

Though it was difficult to hear bad feedback, I feel it undoubtedly helped my writing. Over the past three years the writers group opened so many opportunities for me and the other members. Not only have we had the chance to improve our writing but we also got to help out at Ink, the writer's

group festival, held in Longford. Here we got to meet and talk to experienced writers such as Noel Monaghan and Jean O'Brien - an amazing experience and also reassuring to learn that Irish writing continues after Patrick Kavanagh.

Though our writers group was small it enjoyed undisputable success. Several of our members were placed in competitions such as the C. Day Lewis Competition and the Goldsmith Competition.

However - now the bad news - due to this year's budget cuts our writers group can no longer exist. Well, at least, not in the way we knew it. Anne is no longer able to meet with us and it is hard to imagine how we can continue without someone objective who can point out flaws without being dismissed as bitter or jealous. For those of us who have been in the group since its conception it feels like a huge loss. It's not an exaggeration to say that tears were shed when we first heard the news.

It's been over a month since our last meeting and now that my initial disappointment has settled I'm filled with a huge insatiable fury. It seems unfair to me that although I was lucky enough to be given the opportunity to discover that I was not the only teenage writer in the world, other young people will not be so lucky. Until the economy recovers there may well be a lot of lonely girls scribbling furtively in the back of copy books, praying that nobody discovers their dirty little secret.

ANDREW MURRAY Andy (18) was born, bred and buttered in Dublin before moving to Mullingar aged 11. He likes Chinese tea, dinner with friends and ironing while listening to his iPod called PHEOBO. He recently moved to Swindon & has a housemate called Matt whose one true love is cardboard (don't ask). He is currently designing a book cover for a new Irish writer released at Easter.



'LIFE IS LIKE A GIANT CANVAS Throw as much paint on it as you can'

These were the words of my old art teacher Ms. Niamh Sweeney, while giving out the end of the year art awards, and I couldn't agree more. Our life is our own canvas, and it's ours to do with as we please. We can make it beautiful or colourful, fill it completely or be totally minimalist. Heck, we're even allowed some mistakes. But it's unique, it's individual and it's ours.

My experience of art in the midlands has been a positive and varied creative journey. And according to those responsible for this magazine I have gathered enough experience to be writing this article so *yay me!* But I won't be dishing out some sob story about my struggles or how I became something from nothing. I can't even remember how I became interested in art. All I know is that I was always interested in and inspired by the creative things in life. As for how my drawing skills developed I'm going to hazard a guess and say practice. The more you give your attention to something the more of it you bring into your life and the better you get at it. One thing that has always been a factor in my art is that I didn't just like drawing; I wanted to tell stories as well. Yet I left art alone for a while. I wanted to try other things and give my canvas more variety, so I tried acting.

Stage acting is a different form of art. Props, costumes, music, sets, all very

different to what I had done before, yet still art. And it also involved my interest of telling stories, only this time with my body and voice. I also tried my hand at martial arts, which is an art of the body. It's also not about hurting people but about building confidence and feeling in control.

Then one day my school had a visit from author Caroline Barry who was teaching a writing group every week for those interested. Of course I leapt at the chance. While doing this course I also became the art director of my class mural, and 'marketing manager' for our transition year mini company. We also made and starred in a professional ten minute Irish film which subsequently ended my acting career, realizing I didn't have the patience for TV. Once again I felt as though I didn't have the patience to continue rewriting chapters (don't worry, my new years resolution is to work on my patience) and so I took a big risk in drawing my story instead. I was terrified Caroline would demand I leave the course, hand in my resignation and never pick up a pen again.

But to my pleasant surprise she said 'This has got to go in the book!' What a relief. Not only was what I had done ok with her, she was actually thinking about giving me a space in the book '*Stories from the twisted tree*' to be published at the end of the course! At the start of the

year I had no idea about writing comics and by the end I had one published. Not bad! It was working with Caroline and having these experiences which finally brought my artistic searching to an end. I knew what I wanted to do.

Searching for a course which specialized in what I wanted to do was near impossible, yet eventually I found a perfect course in Swindon, UK. And so I went about preparing my portfolio for an interview. Thanks to Caroline and the published books I stood a great chance of going to Swindon, and now that I'm here I can tell you that it *is* the perfect course for me.

I am in a town big enough to be a city, with very tall buildings and surrounded by new friends, but I can never forget my seven years in the Midlands and how much paint I threw on my canvas during those years.

Yes I've dabbled in many forms of art but my canvas is far from full. There are things I want and need to try before I have that beautifully colourful, vivid, full and quirky canvas which I desire.

My wish is that everyone opened themselves to the imaginative side of their lives. Whether it's a novel you always wanted to write, a play you want to star in or a comic you'd love to draw, find the courage and inspiration to go for it. It's only your life after all. Your canvas. Throw as much paint on it as you can!

TREVOR MULHARE (17) attends Patrician College Ballyfin, Portlaoise. His dream job would be to design tasks on Big Brother or be a taster for Cadburys – head taster preferably, he doesn't want to chew the regurgitated slops of others.

Drama and theatre are crucial elements in my life, they always have been and I reckon they always will. I have been very lucky to be able to participate in many exciting and valuable drama and theatre related projects in my life, introducing me to many different aspects of the arts which still captivate me.

I've been involved in drama since I was 8, taking part in many different workshops and shows. It wasn't until I joined my local youth theatre though that I really started to take it seriously. Youth theatre is a huge part of my life, I've made many great friends and it has strengthened my interest in theatre. I joined when I was 12 and I'm still there today. It's a great way to express my creativity and to learn new aspects and techniques of drama in a place where others share the same interests.

Being a member of a youth theatre has allowed me to take part in some great encounters organised by the National Association for Youth Drama (NAYD). Most recently I was in a youth critics' programme where I got to learn the skills behind being a theatre critic, which involved seeing many

professional productions and getting tutored by a professional critic, Karen Fricker. It was such a unique experience that I feel privileged to have got the opportunity to take part and it opened up my mind to a new side of drama that I was not familiar with before.

Having been to many theatre festivals, I have been able to witness other youth theatres in action. It's amazing to see young groups who have gone through the same things as we have putting on a performance.

I always learn so much from these experiences because everyone's brains are full of crazy and creative ideas which we are able to express through the medium of theatre.

My youth theatre was recently involved in a festival organised by the NAYD in which all of the participating groups were given a choice of scripts to choose from. This was really interesting because many youth theatres chose the same play which was fascinating to watch because of the vast differences between all of the productions and it really showed how people of young ages can still be incredibly talented.



Another reason I think the arts are so good for young people is because at a young age you can have a big role to play in what goes on behind the scenes and gain valuable experience, whereas when you take part in a professional production you have very little input, so being a member of youth theatre allows me to give my opinions, gain an insight into the world of the arts and work in an exciting environment.

One thing that angers me is people's reactions to young people in the arts. People easily overlook a performance by young people because they have the foolish idea that a youth theatre etc. would not be able to put on a serious show. I believe if more people went to see youth performances they would be pleasantly surprised.

I hope that in the future more young people get involved in the arts as it's a great social outlet. It's also a great way to learn some new skills and there is always something going on to get involved in. I would like to see local communities support young people in the arts more. That's my dream, for what it's worth.

CHRIS LALLY (18) is from Edenderry. He has a V for Vendetta obsession and way too much time on his hands (see picture). Also, he's very interested in technology, philosophy and all things flight-related. And Muse..."



People say I'm an amicable, agreeable sort of bloke, generally, but it has to be said that I am fairly argumentative. One thing which has always really annoyed me is indifference. Now, there are plenty of people who manage to muddle along perfectly fine, completely devoid of any strong opinions, views or assertions, but for me, nothing is more frustrating than trying to have a conversation with someone who offers only "What? Er, yeah, I suppose..." in response.

The fact is that I love a really good argument. I like to get properly stuck in with people who have drums to beat, axes to grind and shoulders with bloody great chips on. I don't mean a shouting match though; I mean a proper to-and-fro debate. Maybe it's because I'm not great at sports, but rhetoric is what I enjoy. The cut-and-thrust of a proper clash of opinion gives me energy. And I have to say, this was one part of author Caroline Barry's weekly creative writing workshop which I really enjoyed as the workshops provided a refreshing variety of differing standpoints.

I got to meet with a lot of other people my age, with views ranging from acerbic cynicism to fresh-faced optimism and positivity, from the solidly rational to the grandly esoteric. Quite a few of our meetings ended up with compelling streams of thought darting back and forth across the room, a point being pursued doggedly, rejected by some, seconded by others, and watched closely by all. It was brilliant. I got used to hearing "Actually, I'm going to have to stop you there, we're out of time..." from Caroline as a means of trying to get things back in order.

Of course, such a varied mix of people made for a fantastic environment to share work in. Every piece of writing brought in had to be read out by its author before the group, and the feedback received was vital in putting together a final fully-formed piece.

All the stories and excerpts that ended up in the anthology went through this filter of shared appraisal. As for the writing, the quality, scale and volume was almost intimidatingly good. Thrillers thrilled. The horror stories had actual bite, and the romances possessed eloquence and charm.

The anthology we produced was called "*The Idea and Its Shadow*". It was immensely satisfying to see what I'd written in print, particularly after the protracted period of first wringing out the initial idea, then going over it with a fine-tooth comb, bouncing it off many friends and repeatedly having Caroline give it a look-over.

In 2009, I'm looking forward to going back to the writing workshop, this time we'll be working with actors from the Midlands to produce work that will be displayed on stage. Eugene O'Brien will be helping us with this, having written the television series "*Pure Mule*" and the film "*Eden*". With any luck, we'll also get our work shown at Electric Picnic. This is still under negotiation, but any involvement with the festival is sure to be a big draw for new members to the group. By the looks of it, the Writing Workshop should be very promising in the year ahead, and I can't wait to get back into it.



MARIA TRACEY (17) is from Tullamore. She is in the nightmarish 6th year of secondary school, and hasn't much of a clue what she wants to do in life. Her favourite colour is blue, yet her most precious iPod is yellow. She says she is going on 12, as are many of her companions. Inconsistent is the word that best describes, as evident from the above.



Completely bored one frosty Sunday afternoon, I tormented my parents until they agreed to take me some place exciting. I should have been studying, but I figured 'all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy'. I thought I'd find it hard to find some place exciting, cheap (recession!) and exhilarating around the Midlands - the "cultural backwater for a reason" according to, in my opinion, an uncultured TV producer who was quoted in the last edition of the *Midlands Arts and Culture Magazine*.

To my surprise, after Googling "Midlands, Ireland natural entertainment", my eyes were exposed to a spider web of great places to venture. The one that jumped out at me and seemed the most intriguing was 'Lough Boora Parklands'. The fact that it was just a half hour down the road helped, but their website really did make is sound attractive. So we donned our scarves and gloves, jumped into the Focus, and headed west.

Destination: Lough Boora Parklands.

Mission: Have a good, cultural experience in the Midlands.

Mission impossible I thought to myself as we drove along the icy bumpy road surrounded by those somewhat out-of-place yellow gorse trees. I would not classify myself as a tree hugger, and most definitely not a nature lover, so I stuck on my iPod and rested my blinkers for the duration of the journey.

Stepping out of the car, it took me a while to notice the true beauty of what this particular spot in the Midlands had to offer. After some noisy yawning and

stretching, and reluctantly leaving Glen Hansard in the glove compartment of the car, I found myself truly intrigued by the austerity and tranquillity of this natural arts spot, and I felt a little pang of pride in my heart knowing it was nestled in the heart of *my* Midlands. I also felt a little regretful at having neglected to appreciate the aesthetics of the region for so long. It appeared to me that afternoon that nothing I'd seen compared to the breathtaking sites available for free at Lough Boora.

Now, you may recall I mentioned earlier it was frosty. Well, that's an understatement. It was freezing. Literally. The lake was frozen over. Thanks to that frozen lake, I witnessed the most hilarious, natural, comical, intriguing scene I've ever seen in my whole seventeen years on Earth! Throwing my eyes across the frozen lake, I thought about pushing my mother onto it, to check if it was safe to walk across. Granted she's usually up for a laugh, I was seriously considering just a little push. Clearly she read my mind and began to back away from the lake. Contemplating it once more, I glanced at the lake again, only this time noticing a beautiful swan not-so-gracefully walking across the frozen ice. It appeared her children had the same idea for her as I had for my mother! Desperately trying to get off the evil unfamiliar ice, she began to make the most unearthly sounds in her struggle, hence attracting a crowd of curious tourists. Realistically it's unfair to bathe in other's misfortune, but this was harmless, and it took our minds off the cold for a while.

Keen to further explore the artistic potential of the Midlands, we turned to the 'Sculpture in The Parklands', also on offer for free at Lough Boora. An arrangement of abstract, natural and environmentally friendly sculptures made of natural materials. Each represents a symbol of something, for example the procession of bog trees coming out of the ground stands as a memory of the great forest that inhabited the landscape some 3,000 years ago.

I, feeling very cultured and amazed after my day out, decided to make a resolution to no longer neglect or forget about the artistic and cultural potential of this region. Why travel to the far ends of Ireland to see a play in a theatre, a piece of work in an art gallery, or a natural site of interest, when if you did a little research you would more than likely find something better and cheaper in the Midlands? I, for one, don't have the answer - if you find it, please let me know!

The TV producer I mentioned earlier also commented that when our Taoiseach is gone from the Midlands, "the place will return to the black hole it truly is". What an extremely harsh and pessimistic comment? Remember folks, life is like photography, you develop from the negatives. So, be inspired by his ignorance and fight to prove him wrong; invest just a little time in the potential of the art and culture of the Midlands - I certainly did! This place is no "black hole", but a myriad of colour and tranquillity, constantly developing and revealing new depths of possibilities and prospects!

Music to my ears

FRANCES MULRANEY (18) is in final year at St. Mary's Secondary School, Edenderry, Co. Offaly. She's hoping to study Irish and Journalism in DCU and to become the next Michael Parkinson! If not she'll settle on travelling the world, experiencing new cultures and meeting new people, either through journalism or music. Her fears include the habitual 6th year Leaving Cert panic and an irrational fear of spiders which is so severe that she can't enter a room without checking it out beforehand - this may hamper her future world travel plans...

When I was younger, I always thought classical music was for stuck-up posh people with more money than me - a view shared by my friends. The names Mozart and Handel would be greeted with the refrain "booor-ing". Never in a million years would I have thought that within ten years I would find myself playing in two different orchestras and having a profound appreciation for the classical genre.

Like most people, I started playing music at a young age. Although neither of my parents plays an instrument, traditional music was an important part of my extended family and at age eight I started attending fiddle classes run by my local branch of Ceoltas. Then during a music scheme in my primary school, organized by our local authority, my journey into the magical world of music truly began. When the music teacher first asked me to play the double bass I had to ask my mother what it was, and now I'm known in school as the "girl with the big violin".

Music has become an increasingly important part of my life. I would call it a hobby but I don't think hobbies are supposed to take over your life. Spare time has become a thing of the past as studying for the dreaded Leaving Cert is squeezed in around evening and weekend practices. I've gone from thinking of orchestras as something laughable, to looking forward to the laughs I'll have next time there's a rehearsal. My views of music have been forever transformed and this is thanks to the support of the Midlands Arts Offices and the Arts Council. If funding had not been provided for an orchestra in my school, it's unlikely I'd be so involved today. This funding has enriched the lives of so many young people; it has helped develop the Midlands Youth Orchestra, of which I am a member, to successfully host an orchestra from Bremen and help us to make a return visit next summer. Without proper support this type of exchange would not be possible.

In my opinion, the Midlands are far from being devoid of culture - as is often claimed by those looking west from Dublin. However, there definitely exists a stigmatism about certain genres of music. I have heard bigoted views that traditional music is only for "hillbillies". We need to destroy the myth that only a certain kind of person can like a particular genre of music. Music is for everyone, from a toddler banging out



simple time on a drum kit made from saucepans to an elderly man whistling a tune from his youth as he takes his dog for a stroll. I've such fond memories of Fleadh Ceoil na hÉireann where I took part in traditional music workshops with residents of countries as far apart as Italy and South Korea. I play two contrasting styles of music and I know many others who do the same. Every week in my house the music that resounds through the walls, filling the house with harmony and escaping out the windows and doors to fill the air around us is a fusion of contrasts, as my younger brother strums a jig on a banjo, while my sister takes apart, note by note, a difficult phrase from the orchestral piece she is currently working on.

Music will forever act as a common bond when meeting new people and can jump the treacherous and daunting age gap, uniting young and old. In less than ten years, my beliefs about music have changed so much. If a little girl with posters of boy bands and the Spice Girls on her bedroom wall can be taught to open her mind to Baroque, to jazz and to ethnic music then anyone can. It is my greatest hope that many more will have the opportunity to experience what I have through music. It has taught me valuable lessons, such as listening properly and working with others, as well as introducing me to life-long friends. I know that I will continue introducing those around me to new types of music and encouraging them to extend the boundaries of their musical appreciation. The more people bring music into their lives the better. There is nothing quite like it to bring a smile to your face.

KATIE DELANEY “The name’s Katie Maxwell Delaney. I have but two rules dear reader, you may never refer to me as Maxy or Coffee even if you think it’s hilariously funny (IT ISN’T) and also, referring to me as Kate will only be followed by swift death. I was born in Ranelagh, Dublin but later in life I was moved to the depths of Laois. I am in short a short, fair haired 17 year old with a love of Irish and all things musical. Looking for my house? Set out in the Ballyfin direction and find the absolute middle of nowhere. Once found, my house is only about half an hour north of there. Don’t be alarmed if the road ends and you have to travel on foot.”

THE MIDLANDS...

The Midlands... truthfully it is not the first place that comes to mind when one thinks of the arts but, in all honesty, it should be. There isn’t a great respect for the Midlands in terms of performance, music and art and this is a ‘wrong’ that I personally feel must be righted. For the purpose of this article I asked some friends what they would say on this subject, most mentioned the Dunamais Arts Centre in Portlaoise which is the one and only theatre in my part of the Midlands, and of course I agreed with them. A few mentioned some other worthy places, such as the Abbeyleix Heritage Centre - this is much more than just a place to view the history of the town; it is a performance space and an area for art exhibitions. Another place that was mentioned several times was the Parish Centre in Portlaoise, but by far the loudest response I got was for the Dunamais Arts Centre.

The Dunamais...where does one begin singing its praises? It consists of three attractions; an art gallery upstairs, a lovely cafe downstairs and a sloped auditorium. I’ve been lucky enough in life (through accidents and seized opportunities) to both act on the stage and to work in the theatre (oh Mountmellick Youth Theatre and transition year work experience, where would I be without you?!) and both of those experiences were fantastic.

The Dunamais does more than just hold amateur plays mind you; so much more! It introduces a whole community to the absurd and wonderful world of performance and art. Some things that have been seen on its stage in recent years have been so fascinating, so

sinister, so mystical and well executed. No doubt it’s enriched the imagination of thousands of people - and this is exactly what every theatre strives for. From Beckett’s ‘Waiting For Godot’ to Pat Shortt’s ‘Garage’, from the Portlaoise pantomime to Jack L. Even Tommy Tiernan, Martin Hayes and Denis Cahill!

The people of the midlands have always been looked down upon by their city counterparts. A region of obscure little farming villages without a university, its only use seems to be as place for commuter towns for Dublin workers seeking ‘a better, simpler life’ among the ignorant locals. Shame on those who feel this way. We may not be a sprawling metropolis littered with under-used facilities and hundreds of thousands of people, but we are

appreciative of what we have. We have many talented youths and good schools. We have an abundance of dance, acting, art, music and writing workshops, schools and studios. And of course let us not forget Electric Picnic.

There’s little I can say to those of you who do not see our aptitude and who believe we aren’t even worth the space on this page, but I challenge you to take a trip to any performance/exhibition/amateur film screening in the region and tell me you don’t see the potential. To those who do believe in our abilities and respect the effort we put in, keep your eyes peeled, check your local library notice boards and miss nothing. Sometimes the most magical performances appear in the most murky of places.



ALISON MCEVOY (18) is a 6th year student in Heywood Community College, Ballinakill, Co. Laois, which she helpfully points out is 'near Abbeyleix, which is that little town you all pass through going to Cork; did I mention the traffic jams?? - and that's the only reason anyone would know of it.

' She's a day-dreamer who hates the sight of feet. One of her ambitions is to have an art gallery called The Ali. 'So, if you ever see it drop in and say hi!'

I think art is whatever you make it. It's whatever fascinates you, crosses your mind for a split second and makes you marvel at its existence. Art is something you get lost in. It is both a maze and amazing. Everything in life relates to art in some way. It's a snowflake, a cloud or a poem. I think you can never really be finished investigating an object because it only takes a split second where you see it in a different light and it will start the whole process again.

Recently I've been working with a poem called 'The Pomegranate' by Eavan Boland. I like art with a hidden meaning. 'The Pomegranate' has Greek and Roman mythology throughout so it has lots of stories behind it. I love when one thing leads you on to discover something fantastic. I love 'happy accidents'! I think everyone serious about art as a career has obsessions! Right now mine are pomegranates. Their colour, structure and symbolism fascinate me!

The story of the pomegranate and the seasons began with Persephone, Goddess of the Underworld. Hades took Persephone while she was picking flowers in a field to the Underworld with him. Zeus, Persephone's father, ordered Hades to return Persephone, Hades did as he was requested - after feeding Persephone four pomegranate seeds. Pomegranates are the fruit of the Underworld which meant Persephone must return to the Underworld for four months of the year, winter, when the Earth goes barren.

Inspirations

The work of Dorothy Cross inspires me. I can identify with her methods of investigation and her fascination with organic materials. I think art is about turning something very common into an art form and making people identify with it. I'm interested in plants, fruits and flowers rather than animals, which is not a conscious decision but it always happens. It is the "illusiveness of nature" as Cross says.

Experience of art in the midlands

I was exposed to more creativity than the average child as my parents did shows like the National Craft Fair and I got to know a lot of the exhibitors, so I come from a pretty arty background.

In Transition Year I had two weeks of work experience. I spent one with Liz Nilsson, a textile designer as I'm interested in textiles and the texture of fabric. I found that I liked doing individual pieces, not necessarily something commercial. I think of art as a line of communication or connection between me and others. I spent the next week with Alan Ardiffe Jewellery Design and both experiences provided a great learning curve.

In 2008 I had an internship in The Butler Gallery, Kilkenny. This was by far the

most enriching experience. I found Atsushi Kaga's installation really fun and exciting. That's what I like about art; there are no boundaries. There are no specific rules to hold you back. I gained invaluable experience working in a gallery situation. It gave me a different insight into another extension of art and it was great to meet other artists and talk to them about their work.

My Hopes

My plan is to have a really good portfolio and apply for Art College. I'm keeping an open mind on what to specialise in, because I know I'll change my mind a million times between now and then. I hope that by the time I finish college this horrible recession will be long gone.

I'd love to set up a contemporary art gallery in either Ireland or Sydney. I'd like to travel and gain as much experience as possible. Thailand, India and Africa, it's important to travel, you can capture a moment, feeling, frame of mind or memory forever.

Philosophy

Art captures something that a camera will never see. I think if you investigate something so much that it becomes second nature to you, you need to forget everything and start the whole process again. And of course, follow your dreams.

MÁIRÉAD CARROLL is a Leaving Cert Student at Scoil Chríost Rí in Portlaoise. She is hoping to study music and dance in University of Limerick. Here she gives us a personal account of the people who have influenced and inspired her, through her remarkable experiences of a whole range of different arts in Laois.

To the outside world the Midlands may be regarded as 'the empty hole in a dough nut', but I hope to give people a different impression! The arts in Laois have many different faces, but definitely the central one is Muireann Ní Chonaill, Laois Arts Officer. Not many people know this, but Laois was one of the first counties to appoint an Arts Officer, in 1989. Muireann and her team including, Nuala Kelly (of the Laois School of Music), are fantastic people who somehow manage to take every young person involved in the activities they run under their wings.

In 2004 I was selected for a scholarship for The Laois School of Music. I am now in the middle of my 5th and final year of this unforgettable journey. I have come a long way from the shameful beginnings of squeaking into a flute! We are in the process of preparing to play in the National Concert Hall in February – yet another dream fulfilled. But that's not all – our orchestra has played the Helix, the Electric Picnic and has travelled to France!

The composer Brent Parker composed a number of pieces called "the Slieve Bloom Suite" for us which we performed for RTÉ's Nationwide. Cool or what?! We also rehearsed with The RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra and had private workshops with their musicians.



On the dance scene, life is also exciting. I have been part of the Lynam School of Dance for many years. Irish Dancing has helped me to gain confidence and interaction with lots of people. I regularly perform with a dance troupe which was formed three years ago. Last year we went to Tennessee, to take part in the St Patrick's Day festival. It was an unbelievable experience. The following week I took part in the All Ireland championships in Mayo and won a bronze medal.



I am also very involved in *Comhaltas*. Gerry Conway has been a huge influence; I could honestly say that if it weren't for this man my life could be totally different. His patience and encouragement are reflected in the love people have for him. His little quotes have a deep and personal meaning to all of his students, but my favourite words to hear him say are "well done little lady." The All-Ireland Fleadh is the highlight of every traditional Irish musician's year and this year it takes place in Tullamore for the third time. Last year our *Comhaltas* group and our dance troupe got the chance to perform on the main stage. It was brilliant!

The World Fleadh which was held in Portlaoise was also a major highlight for our town. I had the opportunity to hear musicians such as Sharon Shannon, Mundy, Shane McGowan and Katie Melua, and also got the chance to play with musicians that not everyone hears of - often, the most talented of all! I have also played with artists such as Triona Marshall, Carlos Nunez, Jon Pilatzke, Finbar Furey and performed for Mícheál Ó Muircheartaigh.

In my opinion arts in the midlands is very much alive and healthy. So many people have come from here: Triona Marshall, Gary Dunne, Marie Louise and Patrice Bowe, Pat Boran, Emer Dunne, Heather Forgarty and most recently Pat Critchely who was a teacher of mine. The next big name to come out of Portlaoise will be James O'Connor, so people watch out! So far I have had a great sense of achievement and hope to pursue this for many years to come!

DANIEL CULLETON 16, lives 'in an isolated, hurling driven parish in Offaly.' He attends Birr Community School. Although his passion is music, his primary ambition is to become a zoologist.

A civilisations' complexity is judged on the art that they have produced. The Irish are descended from Celtic Bards, and as such we have an illustrious and respectable musical and literary history. Our lives would be unimaginable without the Arts. Civilisation would have little to chronicle, other than war, if they did not exist. In my opinion the arts are the application of a creative mind. It's more than just about oils on a canvas; its music, dance, literature, sculpture. Art relinquishes us from the tethers of monotony, allows us wander in the garden of cognitive possibility.

I have been given the opportunity of writing my thoughts, as a teenager, on Arts in the Midlands, and although I am far from knowledgeable on this matter; I have personal experience of some forms of it and am eager to share my thoughts. For me personally, music and literature are consuming passions. I have loved them ever since I first came to realise what they actually are - pure pleasure. I learnt to appreciate good music, no matter what the genre - traditional, baroque, blues, jazz, rock or pop music - because in the end all good music has one prevailing characteristic: it strikes a chord with the soul. Yet, while I enjoy listening to music, there is nothing more satisfying than actually creating it. I play a few instruments, my favourite being guitar. The satisfaction when I hit a certain note is sublime - it reverberates right through my body, sending me into a place of sheer pleasure.

When I heard that a "Rock School", was arriving in Birr's Oxmantown Hall, I

immediately signed up, harbouring dreams of playing my beloved music with like-minded people, and emulating my musical heroes. It was a great programme in many ways: we learnt how dastardly the music business can be, and how not to fall for the bad contracts that some unscrupulous record companies push on avaricious and credulous young musicians. We were also taught about things like copyrighting and royalties. The only fault I recognise now was that there was a certain lack of emphasis on the actual tools of the trade, the instruments, although at the time this did not even register, as my energies were so focused on the ultimate night, the night when we were going to get to play to a packed Oxmantown Hall with professional sound equipment and lights. This, as you can imagine, proved to be a brilliant experience for all of us. Many bands have been formed as a direct result of the course. In my opinion it was one of the best things ever done in the Midlands to promote the Arts among teenagers. I made brilliant friends at it and we've all thrived musically ever since, getting together whenever we can to satisfy our insatiable love for music.

Yet, I return to my point about the lack of emphasis on instruments in the course. It was a shame. Perhaps in the future there should be workshops catering for a variety of different instruments? If the Midlands genuinely wish to have musicians of a high calibre in different fields of music, whether orchestral or rock, it's vital that they



nurture talent. Inspiring us when we're young is the key to getting us hooked for life. The Arts benefit community in so many ways. They create closer-knit, more rounded communities. They help the old and the young. I know that art has been introduced in nursing homes and hospices in the midlands to great effect. Various artists do this and the people in the homes find it beneficial. I believe a similar programme could be done with music.

Literature is another passion of mine yet I feel that there aren't many chances in the area for me to develop my interest. There are some great libraries, especially the newly renovated Birr library, but I regret that fact that I've never gotten the chance to participate in a creative writing workshop, or anything like that. I think such workshops should take place more often in the Midlands.

Yet, overall I'm hopeful.. There are great and experienced artists, musicians and authors throughout the Midlands who would probably be grateful for the chance to share their abundant knowledge of the Arts. I feel privileged to have been given this opportunity to voice my opinions and am extremely grateful for it.

SHAUNA BLANCHFIELD (17) attended Colaiste Iosagain in Portarlinton until 2008 and is now at Leinster Senior College. She lives in Ballybrittas and her interests include art (naturally) and event Management. She aspires towards the study of Architecture

Here in the Midlands, a new breed of artists are infiltrating society. Drowning in ambition and steeped in talent we sit here waiting, frustrated, until someone discovers us and we get the recognition we covet. But too many of us leave our aspirations behind, along with our adolescent enthusiasm. I was in danger of falling prey to this snare. Last summer I became completely disillusioned by the new NCAD brief with all its regulations, and realised, like many others, Art College wasn't my true road. So giving up on that dream of dancing through Temple Bar in a recycled dress and dreadlocks, I realised I had to take my future into my own hands. Nobody else will bestow you that break you crave. We all need to make our own luck before we surrender our dreams.

Since formal art education was no longer an option I chanced my arm and asked for an exhibition in the Portlaoise Parish Centre last summer. After two months of my inevitable procrastinating, the pressure built and my vision of perfection became a nightmare of scratchy canvases and broken brushes. But that didn't matter, to anyone. It remained a low-key event, refreshments and entertainment furnished by friends and family. After one week everything came down, only two pieces were bought which barely covered the venue rental. Under no circumstances, though, would I consider it a failure, and this is why.

I presumed, it was over, forgotten about, and completely unnoticed by the local media. But I was wrong; I then was offered an exhibition in the Abbeyleix Library's Gallery in December. I was taken aback by their level of interest and involvement with the project. All I needed to do was provide the actual paintings. Age or experience was never an issue; Katherine Foyle and Michelle McCartney (co-exhibitors) and I were treated like professionals.

The Abbeyleix exhibition was a resounding success. Rotimi Adabari opened the exhibition, and most of the paintings were sold. So what I say to all of you out there is to give it a try, people pay attention. Since then, art for me has been completely transformed, and this I feel is the biggest issue we need to overcome in the Midlands. Its time we young artists make our voices heard, because the public and authorities do take heed, especially if you speak in the cultural language of your audience. Once you are seen to break ground, your efforts are taken quite seriously.

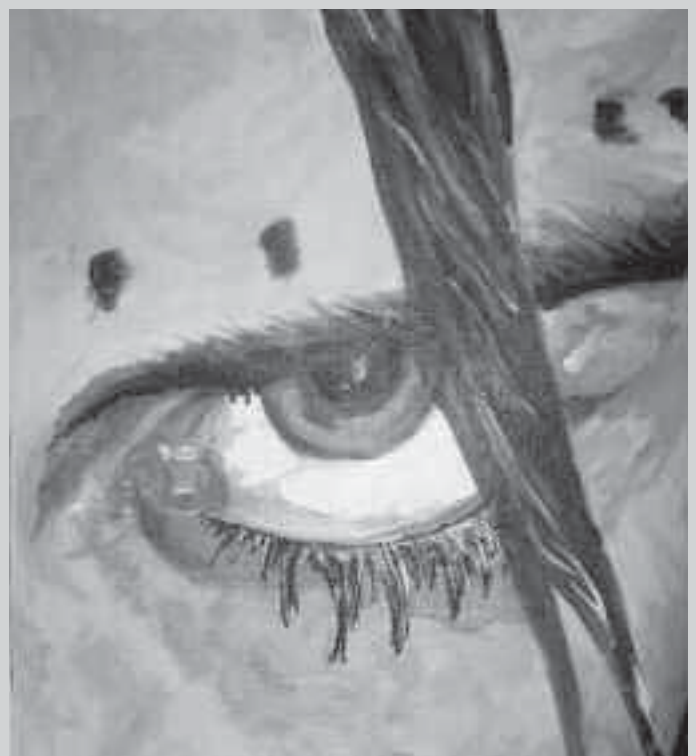
It isn't just in painting that the youth are making waves. Mark Dollard has set up a Film Club in Portlaoise screening short films and music videos in the Dunamaise. An example to us all is the driving force of Portlaoise artist Leona Duff. At the age of 17, and completely on her own initiative, she has storyboarded, scripted and shot a short film here in Laois

called 'Sandman' with the help of the Film Club. It illustrates the determination a single person can have.



In my estimation, the single greatest exemplar of standard for youth art achievements is that of the APA youth club based in Portlaoise. The most important of their projects is the annual Future Sounds Festival, which has been running since 2006 showcasing young bands from across the country in a drink and drug-free setting.

Sometimes it's true to say, there aren't many groundbreaking opportunities for young artists in Laois. But why should there be? Did Louis le Brocquy get his career handed to him on a silver platter? Did Dorothy Cross wake up one morning to find herself famous? They chiselled and chipped until their talent was noticed, and made visible their imagination and inspiration to hungry enthusiasts. So don't ask what the council, or the public can do for you, ask what you can do for yourself. And then, please, go out and do it, take the first step. And don't look over your shoulder because no one will take a chance on you if you won't take a real risk.



SINEAD CORCORAN is 18 and currently a leaving cert. student in Loreto College Mullingar. Training and dancing for many years with Shawbrook Dance School, she has an ambition to pursue Dance as a career and talks here about the formative opportunities it has provided her growing up in the midlands.

The best part of growing up in the midlands is that we are privileged to have so many people dedicated to the arts. For me, dance is so much a part of my life today and who I am, that it is impossible for me to imagine my life without it. From the day I took my very first ballet lesson to now, eleven years later, I have been privileged enough to be a part of the wonderful organisation that is Shawbrook School of Dance. It is not merely a dance school for me and many others; it is so much more than that.

I count myself as very lucky to have had the opportunity to be a student in Shawbrook and also to have been a member of National Youth Dance Company for the past six years. I am sitting my Leaving Cert this year, so I could not take the time to commit myself fully to it this year, a decision that was very hard to make.

For people who are not familiar with Shawbrook let me tell you a bit about it. Set on a farm in the midst of Co. Longford, it is a well equipped dance space with two studios and its own theatre and dormitory facilities. It plays host to the Irish National Youth Dance Company, which are intensive summer dance courses held over 5 weeks in the summer and many other workshops and courses throughout the year. Over the last eleven years Shawbrook has become my home away from home, where support and a friendly face are always sure to be found.

I have been privileged enough to meet and dance with some of the most prestigious names in the dance world, Simon Rice and Cathy Sharpe to name but a few. Through the hard work and dedication of Anica Louw, Founder and her husband Philip Dawson, Co – Directors of Shawbrook I have had experiences that would not have been possible anywhere else in the country.

Also organised by Anica is the annual Irish National Dance Awards which has grown into the Longford Dance Festival.

Through participation in these events I have gained valuable confidence and stage experience, which will hopefully stand to



me in years to come. This provides young dancers with an opportunity to showcase their talents and artistry with a wider audience, esteemed judges and with fellow dancers.

Westmeath Arts Office, over the years has awarded grants to many of the students passing through the school. I have been lucky enough to receive financial support and this has helped greatly with the accumulating costs of shoes, exams fees, etc. As a child I was sent to ballet lessons to improve my posture because I was shy of being tall.

Having a serious hobby and interest such as dance was a definite advantage, a way of escaping pressure from school and the ordinary stresses of growing up, and it was also a great way of making new friends and now some of my closest friends are the ones I met through being a member of NYD.

I am at the age where decisions must be made about a future career, and I have decided to take a few auditions in England with the hope of pursuing a future in dance. This is something I would never have considered without my experience at Shawbrook and the full support of my parents.

Being a student of Shawbrook has given me the courage and confidence to pursue my dreams and to know that nothing is impossible if you work hard for it. Shawbrook is a place of inspiration, and I hope it will continue to be so for many, many other young people from the Midlands in the years to come.

MIDLAND YOUTH ORCHESTRA NEWS

BY RONAN WHITTERN (18)



I am a member of Midlands Youth Orchestra, the Lir Orchestra and also the National Youth Orchestra. I have been involved for two years and have thoroughly enjoyed it all. I have been playing the bassoon for three years and am currently studying music in DIT with John Hearne. Music means everything to me and I am very lucky to have not one but two youth orchestras near me.

Without the previous experience of playing in a youth orchestra I would have been at a great loss in the National Youth Orchestra. I hope to make a career in music and all of my experience in orchestras has so far been invaluable.

The Lir orchestra is the local orchestra of the Mullingar-Kinnegad area. It is supported by Shane Brennan through the Westmeath V.E.C. The V.E.C. supplies the building for the rehearsals and also provides some teaching hours, though the parents of many of the members have had to pay extra to increase these hours. It has rehearsals in the Old School House in Kinnegad every Monday, under Vincent Hunt. The orchestra is currently rehearsing for the Festival of Irish Youth Orchestras in the National Concert Hall. This will be the

second time that the orchestra has performed in the National Concert Hall. The Lir Orchestra will be performing with Laois School of Music Orchestra in the concert. This will be the first that the two orchestras will perform together.

Many of the members of the Lir Orchestra are also members of the Midlands Youth Orchestra. Vincent Hunt is also the conductor of this orchestra. The orchestra is supported by the Midland Arts Officers as the members of the orchestra come from all of the midlands counties. The orchestra is a member of the Irish Association of Youth Orchestras.

The Orchestra recently paired with the Bremen Youth Orchestra from Germany. The Bremen Youth Orchestra visited

Ireland during the summer and stayed with members of the Midlands Youth Orchestra. They played with the Midlands Youth Orchestra in the Cathedral of Christ the King in Mullingar. The Midlands Youth Orchestra will be going to Bremen this year to play again with the Bremen Youth Orchestra. Most of the members are still in contact with each other since the wonderful workshop. Everyone is looking forwards to the return visit.

Workshops of three to four days take place during the Christmas, Easter, and Summer Holidays. A concert is put on at the end of each workshop. Venues have included Whitla Hall in Belfast, the Dean Crowe Theatre, and also National Concert Hall, where they performed last year in the Festival of Youth Orchestra.

The Parents committee contribute a lot to the running of both orchestras and have fundraisers organised for the not too distant future. My experience of the arts in the midlands has been a very much positive one and I hope that the facilities will stay there for more people to enjoy.

LAOIS APPOINTMENTS TO THE ARTS COUNCIL

PAT MOYLAN, CHAIRPERSON



"As a proud Midlander I am of course delighted and honoured to be appointed Chair of the Arts Council. But I am also deeply conscious of the magnitude of the task and the weight of responsibility which goes with it.

Many will be aware of my background as Artistic Director and chief bottle-washer of Andrews Lane Theatre, now sadly closed, but which I kept going as long as I could. I have also done a lot of work as an independent theatre producer and some work as a film producer, and I will continue to be active in these fields, provided I can find the time! But my new role embraces *all* the Arts in Ireland, which is daunting enough but is made all the more challenging by the economic recession and the severe scarcity of public funds for any purpose, no matter how worthy.

I am Chairing an organisation which has a terrific record in supporting the growth and development of the arts in this country. We fund individual artists and artists working collectively. We never have enough money but I think we have done a pretty good job and in general made good choices. It has been a crucial support system for the Arts in Ireland.

The Arts Council now faces the future, aware of the economic constraints, but confident in the quality and creativity of work of our artists in all sectors; certain of its increased importance in uplifting the soul of the nation, and determined to do our utmost to encourage and stimulate that creative output and to secure whatever funding we can to facilitate the effort and to nurture even better artistic outcomes.

You can do your bit by supporting the arts in the Midlands and elsewhere and helping us to spread the enjoyment and enrichment that the arts can give to an ever wider audience, which is the ultimate purpose of our work and the key to future growth."

LOUISE DONLON

"As an administrator in the arts for the past 20 years, it was an enormous honour and privilege to be appointed to the Arts Council. Having worked over the past number of years with Pat Moylan, I feel a great sense of good fortune to be working with her as Chairperson over the next five years.

Since my early years growing up in Moydow, Co Longford, I have always had a keen interest in the arts. I studied Music at third level and indeed, thought that this would be the area in which I would work most extensively. It turned out quite differently in that I worked for some years in the Arts Council in the early 1990s, principally in the drama department. This led to a great love of theatre and through my work with Island Theatre Company and Druid Theatre in Galway, I have become much more associated, professionally, with theatre.

Being based in the midlands, and long having had an interest in the funding of arts organisations and activities outside the major urban centres, my professional focus has always been on access to the arts. I hope to continue that focus, both in the context of my ongoing work at the Dunamais Arts Centre as well as in the context of my membership of the Arts Council.

In these challenging times, the arts will play an important role in allowing people to express themselves, to gain respite from the seemingly endless stream of bad news and to give them hope for the future. Indeed it has been proven that box office figures, particularly in music and cinema, increase in times of recession so we will continue to play a role in giving people a refuge from the doom and gloom. The way out of recession is also using our creativity to forge new paths: we must nurture that creativity and give it a voice in every way possible. These things are hard to measure, but their importance is no less for that."

Biographical note:

Louise holds a BA in Music and History, a Diploma in Arts Administration and a Masters in Public Administration, in the early 1990s she worked at the City Arts Centre in Dublin and at the Arts Council, followed by three years in Limerick as administrator of Island Theatre Company. In 1996, she moved to Galway to take up the position of general manager with Druid Theatre Company.

In early 1999 she was appointed manager of the Dunamais Arts Centre, a multi-disciplinary arts centre, comprising a 240 seat theatre and exhibition space. The Dunamais is now regarded as one of the premier regional arts centres. Louise is a founder member of Nasc, a network of regional theatre established to promote touring of high quality work to the regions.



FilmOffaly Award 2009

FilmOffaly, Offaly's Film Commission in association with **Filmbase** is pleased to announce a new funding initiative to foster creative, resourceful filmmaking in the county. Film Offaly are looking for unique, original stories by talented new filmmakers, professional and novice alike. They only stipulation is that the filming must take place in Offaly!

The winning applicant will receive

- €8,000 towards the cost of their production;
- 1-year's Filmbase membership to the Writer, Producer and Director of the winning film
- A 50% discount on production equipment and/or editing facilities from Filmbase for the project
- Use of Filmbase's production insurance to cover the shoot
- A premier in Tullamore Omniplex Cinema

The award will be based on a two stage application process. For stage one, please submit a script including 500 word synopsis of the film project. Screenplays from any genre, style, topic or perspective will be considered and judged on its merits regarding the quality of the material along with interviews and re-writes with/by the applicant/s.

Shortlisted applicants will be invited to attend for interview.

Closing date: **Friday April 3rd at 4pm**

Please send application to:

FilmOffaly, Offaly County Council,
Charleville Road, Tullamore, Co. Offaly
For information contact 057 9357400
or email filmoffaly@offalycoco.ie



Athlone FILM Club
Dean Crowe Theatre & Arts Centre

CHILDREN'S MOVIES THIS SPRING

THE GOONIES
Sunday, 15th February

The Wizard of Oz
Sunday, 29th March

E.T.
Sunday, 19th April

All films start at 2.30 p.m. sharp
Special Members Rates:
Children €3 Adults €3 Film Club Members Free
Contact us at athlonefilmclub@gmail.com

Athlone FILM Club
Dean Crowe Theatre & Arts Centre

Spring 2009 - Showing Soon on the Big Screen...

My Brother is an Only Child

Margot

The Last Mistress

Coram

The 39 Steps

Sign on Reels

Emma's Bliss

Blind on Wire

The Pawn's Toll

All films start at 2 p.m. sharp
Special Members:
Single €30 Couple €50 OAP/Student €25 with Member €7
Contact us at athlonefilmclub@gmail.com

Join the club with the big screen

Athlone Contemporary Visual

A new flagship, purpose built Gallery and Studio development located in the centre of Athlone town is seen as a crucial element in the development of the arts and culture sector locally and regionally and in line with the objectives of the Westmeath County Arts Plan 2003-2009 to promote access and enjoyment of the arts for all its citizens. The new Arts centre's distinctive feature is its strategic location in the heart of Ireland, and its scale, aspiration and potential to be one of Ireland's most important and innovative contemporary visual arts centres, developing and maintaining a strong regional, national and international reputation. The River Shannon is at the heart of Athlone and the source of its natural beauty, and the riverbank is soon to be home to Athlone's flagship Contemporary Visual Arts Gallery.

The development, due to open in 2010, represents a major development in the provision of cultural infrastructure in Athlone and the Midlands region. The commitment by Athlone Town Council and Westmeath County Council to develop and operate professionally managed, purpose-built gallery facilities with associated artists' studio facilities located in the former fire station, is a progressive measure for the development of the arts and culture in the region.

Athlone is commonly referred to as "the gateway to the west" and is ideally located to become a top class cultural tourism destination in the region. The Gallery development aims to play host to a dynamic temporary exhibition programme by inviting works by leading local, national and international contemporary artists and to host some of Ireland's foremost collections of modern and contemporary art. The Gallery also aims to stage historical and retrospective exhibitions, particularly of Irish art, often encompassing work from Westmeath County Council's Collection and other loans from prestigious permanent collections, local and national, such as that of IMMA, the Arts Council, the Model Niland in Sligo, among others. This project has been made possible for Westmeath Local Authorities through the allocation of funding by the local authorities and a grant by the Department of Arts, Sport & Tourism under the ACCESS Programme.

The Gallery aims to play a pivotal role in Athlone's cultural life; as well as a diverse and stimulating exhibitions programme, the



Arts Gallery and Artist Studios

Gallery aims to undertake a wide range of activities both within and outside the Gallery which is proactive in audience development and engagement, and which encourages and nurtures participation from all sectors of the community.

Education is central to people's appreciation of the arts and the new Gallery's education policy will actively encourage both participation and appreciation in the visual arts through a schedule of innovative projects and programmes. It is the aim of the gallery that children, teachers, families and adults can participate in a wide range of innovative and enjoyable learning opportunities. A lively education and outreach programme will forge strong links with local schools, community groups and the many existing arts groups, with activities ranging from Kids Club workshops, adult education courses, active retirement events and regular artist talks and lecture series. The education and outreach programme will provide invaluable insights into the artist's life, inspirations, unusual techniques and working methods as well as facilitating the engagement of local adults and children alike to engage in arts education exploring new expression and possibilities in all media.

The Fr. Matthew Hall will be the home of this flagship cultural development, keeping in line with its long history and heritage in serving the people of Athlone and surrounding regions as a centre of cultural significance. From 1897 to c1920 this building was a mixed use Temperance Hall which had a reading room and a cafe and was used for political meetings, concerts, theatricals, musicals, slide-shows, boxing matches and the first local film screenings. Westmeath Local Authorities aims to programme once again a wide ranging and diverse programme of cultural activities for the people of Athlone and surrounding regions, placing Athlone and the Fr. Matthew Hall once again as a centre of cultural activity and excellence.

As a Temperance Hall it was the venue for the earliest concert in which John Mac Cormack appeared on stage with his future wife, the soprano, Lily Foley in 1903. Percy French also appeared on stage here. It later became The Shannon Cinema (c1920), Athlone's first designated cinema and later changed its name to The Savoy. The coming of the first purpose built cinema, The Ritz, in 1940 saw the decline in fortunes of the Fr Mathew Hall. However the current plans for Athlone's first purpose built modern art gallery, places the Fr. Matthew Hall firmly back as a



vital and vibrant social and cultural building for the people of Athlone and the midlands region.

Westmeath Local Authorities are proactive in the promotion of County Westmeath as a location for investment locally, nationally and internationally and the proposed development will be a major recreational, cultural and community amenity, adding to the many attractions already on offer in the county and affirming Athlone as a quality cultural tourist destination and copper fasten Athlone's place on the national cultural tourism map.

As we move into this exciting phase of the development of the centre, the plans are currently on display on the Athlone Town Council Website.

View plans of the proposed development at <http://www.athlone.ie/udc/notice>



MIDLANDS COLLEGE OF PHOTOGRAPHY

The arrival of relatively inexpensive but technically sophisticated digital SLR cameras has stimulated a huge renewal of interest in photography both as a hobby and as a means of creative expression.

The revival of interest in photography is evidenced by the number of new camera clubs being established e.g. Athlone, Longford and Granard and the ever increasing number of courses in digital photography, Adobe Photoshop and associated subjects.

In response to this growing demand County Longford VEC Adult Education Service, in partnership with the County Arts Office, has established the Midlands College of Photography in Templemichael Community College Longford.

Over the past number of years FETAC courses have been delivered at Templemichael College in film photography, digital photography and in Adobe Photoshop and students have been drawn from Longford and surrounding counties of Roscommon, Leitrim, Cavan and Westmeath. Examples of the portfolio of work created by the students on FETAC courses 3 & 4 are presented as The Red Eye Photography Exhibition which is currently on tour between The Tuar Ard Gallery, Moate the Atrium Gallery Longford and Cavan County Museum Ballyjamesduff.

According to County Arts Officer, Fergus Kennedy: "the most appealing aspect of the establishment of the Midland College of Photography from the photographer/artist point of view is the flexibility of programming, courses vary in length from a calendar year in the case of FETAC Level 5 Digital Photography to one week in the case of environmental photography to a week end for studio – portrait photography. Courses will also be pitched at varying levels from absolute beginners to advanced photographic techniques."

While the Midland College of Photography offers a programme of core subjects we are committed to being as flexible as possible to the requests of midland photographers. We will welcome programming or project proposals from interested members of the public and we look forward to working closely with photographers through the region.

For further information relating to the Midland College of Photography please contact Longford County Arts Office (043) 34918 (086)8517595 fkennedy@longfordcoco.ie

To book a place on any of our courses please contact county Longford VEC Adult Education Office 043 45474

PUBLIC ART IN LONGFORD

- An old theme with a new twist

Longford Town Council decided in 2008 that the theme for its latest percent for art commission should be that of; emigration. The theme for the piece was suggested by the location, between the Royal Canal and Longford Railway Station the two points of departure for tens of thousands of Longford emigrants for over two hundred years.

It was felt that since representations of the many negative aspects of emigration had been dealt with in so many public art features, especially since the Famine commemoration in 1997, we should approach the subject from a different angle. The Town Councillors decided that the Longford emigration monument should be a celebration of the great achievements of Longford emigrants and their descendents in so many different walks of life in practically every country of the world. Essentially, that County Longford's gift to the world was the talent and industry of its people.

There was a very significant response from artists both at home and abroad which was entirely appropriate for a commission on a theme of emigration. The winning entry was from Westmeath based sculptor Mel French who successfully encompassed the two dimensions of the commission in one proposal.

The two dimensions of the commission; the first, emigration from Longford, the second, Longford's emigrant's contribution to their host societies were neatly encompassed in the symbol of the suitcase or more particularly a suite of four suitcases of varying heights.

The proposal is for a suite of four bronze suitcase forms attached to four bush hammered limestone bases. Each suitcase is moulded and cast from a real old-fashioned leather suitcase so that the bronze casts retain the details such the handle, buckles, locks, stitching and straps which are both sculpturally interesting and easily recognisable as a suitcase form.

Each suitcase has a rectangular negative space removed from the centre and within that negative space are small bronze figures and objects that create a tableau representative of some positive contributions that Longford emigrants have made in their host societies. Each suitcase therefore may be viewed and interpreted from both sides. On the two opposing sides of the stone base there are rebates within the stone holding an A5 bronze plaque containing descriptions of different skills and various contributions that Longford emigrants made world wide.

The piece will be unveiled in early May 2009 and members of the public may gain access by walking along the Royal Canal bank from the Market Square, Longford from the Park Road, Longford.

MARK GARRY

at the Hugh Lane Gallery

Frequency presents an exhibition of the work of Westmeath born artist and former Venice Biennial participant, in **Dublin** on **26th February 2009 to 17th May 2009**

Born in Mullingar in 1972, and currently based in Ireland Garry's work stems from a fundamental interest in observing how humans navigate the world and the subjectivity inherent in these navigations. While Mark uses a variety of media and mechanisms in his practice, he primarily focuses on institution-based installations.

These delicate considered, site-specific installations are measured and quiet and require meticulous systems of construction. They combine physical, visual, sensory and empathetic analogues, creating arrangements of elements that intersect the space and form relationships between a given room and each other. His practice is a generative process and involves the stretching and consolidating of the physical capabilities of the materials he work's with, both as individual entities

and when combined with other materials and objects. Through his intervention one's perception of these materials is altered fundamentally from their utilitarian origins.

Garry has had a number of notable exhibitions including most recently; the Mattress Factory Art Museum Pittsburgh Pennsylvania USA (2008). "Green screen " The Institute of Contemporary art Newtown, Sydney Australia.(2008)" "All colours Black, next to nothing" RHA Dublin (2007) "Rapid Eye Movement" Temple Bar Galleries, Dublin (2007) "It's Difficult to say "Gallery 2,The Paradise .Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin (2006)" "Making and finding". The foundation to life, New York ,USA (curated by Cathy Siegel.) (2006) "No one else can make me feel the colours that you bring' Temple Bar Galleries, Dublin (2004) 3 Person show, Kerlin



Gallery Dublin(2004)Mark represented Ireland at the 2005 Venice Biennale in a group exhibition 'Ireland at Venice 2005', which was subsequently presented at the Lewis Glucksman Gallery, Cork, in 2006



Mark Garry, Being There, Mattress Factory, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 2008, Photo courtesy of the artist

IRISH PREMIERE FOR BIRR STAGE GUILD

The Likes of Us was the first collaboration between Sir Tim Rice and Lord Andrew Lloyd Webber following their meeting in 1965 when both were college students. Tim Rice had great ambitions of fame as a pop singer or songwriter, and Andrew Lloyd Webber aimed at becoming the next Richard Rogers.

Set in mid-Victorian London, **The Likes Of Us** tells the story of Barnardo, a fiery, young medical student who gave up his plans to be a missionary in China when he realised the extent of the desperate homelessness of many children in his own city. This led to the foundation of the famous children's homes and the organisation that bears his name today. Portrayed through great melodies and rousing choruses, it takes us on an imaginary journey through East End slums, tenement rooftops and the Houses of Parliament.

In 2005, forty years later, **The Likes Of Us** was performed and recorded in a semi staged format at Andrew Lloyd Webber's Sydmonon Festival and included a newly written linking narrative. The show was received with enormous enthusiasm and then released in 2008 for a number of amateur productions.



Birr Stage Guild in Rehearsal

Tues 24 - Sat 28th March €18 (conc €16 - Tue only)
Patrons Gala Night: Sat 28th €45 - 8pm

Booking at: Birr Theatre & Arts Centre - 057 9122911,
Mon - Fri 1pm - 5.30pm

For further information, see www.birrstageguild.com

"INTO THE HALF LIGHT"

Artist Antoinette Breen
Photo: Andy Mason



Antoinette Breen held her first solo exhibition in Áras an Chontae, Portlaoise in February. The exhibition entitled "**Into the Half Light**" consisted of thirty works in oils, acrylics and mixed media and was launched by local architect Michael Rice

She is a graduate of Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology, the National College of Art and Design and N.U.I., Maynooth. In 2008, Antoinette was selected by Laois County Council as recipient of the 'Tyrone Guthrie Bursary' an accolade which has permeated some of her current work on exhibition. She featured in the exhibition 'Portraits of Laois Artists' in 2007 and has exhibited widely in group shows in



Painting by Antoinette Breen. Photo by Andy Mason

Laois and Kildare, and has art work in private collections in Ireland and the U.S.

Recently diagnosed with Haemochromatosis, a genetic disorder of the blood, Antoinette's recent work has veered into the domain of the abstract. 'I have become engrossed in the life force that is blood, not only in its

by Antoinette Breen

biological components but also as it is the very substance which binds us as a people, not just in a physical sense but in a spiritual sense also. This awakening has infused in me a renewed joyous vigour, which has led to a heartfelt celebration of colour as a means of unearthing the essence of life, the souls journey as it were'.

Pinocchio and other dance stories in Offaly



Hanging in There
– Nick Bryson and
Damian Punch

Legitimate Bodies Dance Company are currently working with 3rd Class at Birr Boys Primary to devise a completely new and unique dance drama version of the Pinocchio story.

The production will be directed by Cristina Goletti and her colleague Nick Bryson will perform with the boys, as Pinocchio. It will be a thoroughly up-to-date dance drama work for children, using a minimalist aesthetic. Artistic influences for this Pinocchio include the Walt Disney cartoon version of the story, as well as other literary and visual contemporary sources. It will be a visually strong production that will also incorporate the creative ideas of the children.

Look out for the production in Birr Theatre and Arts Centre 29th and 30th April. The company is delighted to have the opportunity to work with a school in their hometown. Thanks to Maureen De Forge for making the project possible.

Later in March and April, in a follow-up to the successful 'Hanging in There' on Northern Irish politics, Nick Bryson and Damian Punch, together with Andreas Sharfenberg, will delve into the mirky links between what we all love so much about dance and what we secretly all love about our 80's and 90's domestic life, children's television. The research period takes place in Dance House, Dublin, and Dance Base Edinburgh, supported by Dance Ireland. At the same time Cristina Goletti will be developing a new work with Dutch choreographer, Arno Schuitemaker, in Birr.

New creative writing courses in Portlaoise

The Arts Office are delighted to present a new series of creative writing workshops in Áras and Chontae, Portlaoise with highly acclaimed writers Jean O'Brien, John Maher and Ann Egan. The courses running from February to May are open to all levels of writers and are planned to assist and explore the work of the individual writer and to give guidance in a constructive and non-intimidating manner. One of the aims of this series of writing courses is to compile a new anthology of writings from selected works and to enjoy working as a group to further peoples' interest in writing.

Fee for 4 week course is €50/€40 concessions.

Places are limited and booking is essential

Brochure and booking forms are now available from

The Arts Office, Laois County Council

Tel: 057 8674342/41 artsoff@laoiscococo.ie

or can be downloaded from the website www.laois.ie

DUNAMAISE ARTS CENTRE Celebrates 10 Years with World Class Acts



The Dunamaisé Arts Centre Portlaoise celebrates its 10th Anniversary in May this year and has lined up a very exciting selection of events from theatre to music performances, exhibitions and much more, the details of which are contained within its brand new spring 2009 brochure. Among the line up of events is the world's most successful Irish traditional music performers The Chieftains. The six time Grammy Award winners will perform at the Dunamaisé on Thursday, May 21st for one night only.

Many more fantastic events are included within the Dunamaisé spring programme to celebrate its anniversary including free family events at Portlaoise Town Plaza with a performance of aerial acrobatics, musical comedy and trapeze in Tumble Circus during the May Bank Holiday weekend and within the arts centre itself with an open house on Saturday May 2nd providing fun and entertainment for all the family with face painting, balloon making, kinder music workshops and much more. The Dunamaisé is also organising a Gala Mid-Summer Ball on June 26th, a fabulous night of dining, music and dancing and featuring the hilarious comedy show Fawltly Towers.

Also adding to the extraordinary programme at the Dunamaisé this spring is performances by Brendan Grace, Jimmy McCarthy, Don Baker, Frances Black, Brian Kennedy, Liam Clancy and Mick Flavin as well as Druid Theatre, Livin Dred Theatre Co. as well as exhibitions featuring artists who have worked with the arts centre over the past 10 years.

Tickets are now on sale for events this spring at the Dunamaisé. See www.dunamaisé.ie for a full list of events or contact Box Office on 057 866 3355 for further details.

“Piece Work” by Stacia Blake

The Arts Office, Laois County Council will host an exhibition of work by artist Stacia Blake from March 12th to April 3rd. Stacia is an international artist who lives and works in Stradbally, Co. Laois and also Berlin, but she describes herself as a midlands artist first. The exhibition titled “**Piece Work**” will be officially launched by Shinji Yamada, Cultural Attaché at the Japanese Embassy.

The work is about remembering those people who lost their lives in the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki on the 6th and 9th of August 1945. Stacia feels it is of great importance to learn from the lessons of the past, in order to move forward to a peaceful future.

Earlier this year Stacia spent two months in Japan. Visiting Hiroshima and Nagasaki, she describes the very deep sadness

Artist Stacia Blake
Photo: Andy Mason



she experienced while visiting the epicenters of the bombings. Talking with locals and visitors, she made works in the Peace Parks of both places. During her stay in Japan she worked with traditional materials such as sumi ink on shikku boards.

It is her intention to continue to create these works, until she has created a circle for every person who died. According to Stacia ‘it is important for me as an artist to create this work in a way which is respectful to the people who died, their families and country, while also making a statement against war and the use of atomic weapons’.

Official opening by Shinji Yamada, Cultural Attache at the Japanese Embassy. March 12th 7.30pm. Opening hours Monday to Friday from 9.00am to 5.00pm until Friday 3rd April 2009. **The Arts Office, Laois County Council**
057 8674344 artsoff@laoiscoco.ie

THE HERE AND THERE new paintings by Jock Nichol Aras an Chontae, Tullamore, Co. Offaly, March 25 to April 24

Since moving to Ireland, Scottish artist, Jock Nichol has been a prolific painter, drawing inspiration from the landscape of the Midlands. “Though I love the wild and remote parts of the country, most of my material comes from the everyday landscape near my adopted home in Offaly.

Having grown up in the Cheviot Hills in the Scottish Borders, I feel a strong connection to the open spaces and big vistas of the bog and Slieve Blooms. Despite the grandeur of the Midland landscape it is far from being a symbol of timeless stability or nostalgia.

It is in a constant state of slow flux – the systematic plantation of conifers and the post industrial nature of the bog; all this subliminally affects our view and adds certain poignancy to images of an increasingly fragile environment.” Jock has spent many times in both Annaghmakerrig and Cill Rialig and has exhibited widely with nine solo shows

and fifteen group shows in Ireland to date.

His exhibition *The Here and There* in Aras an Chontae, Tullamore opens on March 25th and continues until April 24th 2009. For more information see www.offaly.ie/arts or contact 057 9357400

Along Beside Pines by Jock Nichol



FÍS MULTI-MEDIA ARTS EXHIBITION

Opening Saturday 28th 2pm- 5pm

Sunday 29th March – Saturday 4th April 10am-5pm



FÍS Athlone is a contemporary Multi-Media exhibition and residency project taking place in Passionfruit Theatre, Athlone. This is a two-week project:

WEEK 1 – giving artists the opportunity for open discussion and experimentation, creating a platform for mutual learning and exchange.

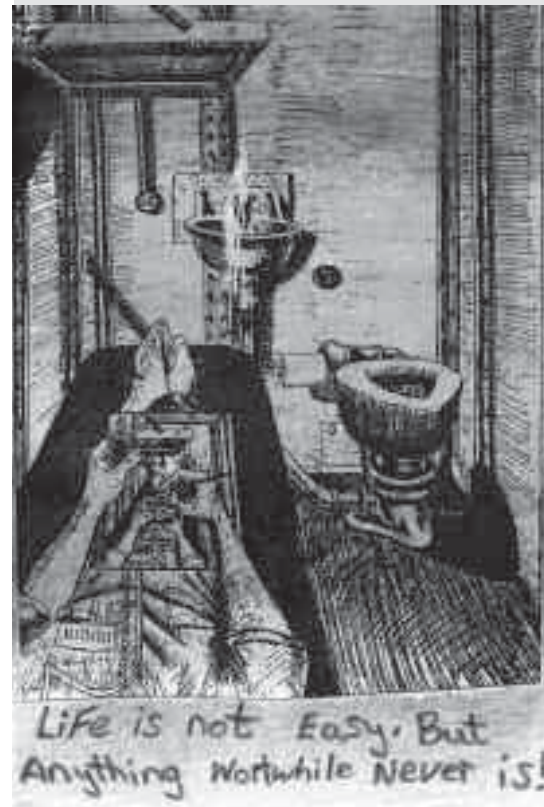
WEEK 2 – an exhibition showcasing the new work produced by the artists during the residency period.

FÍS involves both emerging artists; April C Mellor (England), Tokumasa Matsubuchi (Japan), Mary-Jo Gilligan (Co. Kildare), Edward Simpson (Scotland) and students; Ronald Boer (Edinburgh College of Art), Deirdre Ohlwein (Athlone Institute of Technology) creating a new platform for mutual learning and exchange to take place. This is an opportunity for artists to work alongside each other in developing new and challenging work that looks to the town of Athlone and Passionfruit Theatre, the space and architecture, as the context with which to respond to. The project has received support from Westmeath County Council Arts Office and project advice from Sarah Searson, Curator. FÍS was initiated and produced by Athlone Visual Artist and Curator Miriam Walsh. FÍS Athlone is dedicated to developing

new working opportunities for artists, and for contemporary artistic exchange to take place within the Midlands while also aiming to explore and identify alternative exhibition and workspaces for artists. FÍS will look at activating sites such as the Passionfruit Theatre, Athlone Castle and spaces within Athlone Institute of Technology on Northgate St. and around the town by way of exhibition, working space and working facilities. By using these spaces the participants will be able to immerse themselves within the fabric of the town and the community. Artists will be encouraged to use the navigation between these points as the backdrop to the development of their work. This will be further emphasised by an introductory walking tour given by Gearoid O'Brien (executive librarian of Athlone Library) to the artists upon their arrival looking at the history of the sites involved.

FÍS aims to cross boundaries between art forms within Athlone's creative community by collaborating with Passionfruit Theatre, AIT and Edinburgh College of Art and specifically with the MFA - Art, Space and Nature.

FÍS Athlone is supported by Edinburgh College of Art, Westmeath County Council, WCC Emerging Artist Award and the Arts Council. For further information please contact Miriam Walsh; 0044 77 5812 7815, 085 7256417 or walsh.miriam@gmail.com www.fisathlone.wordpress.com or Westmeath County Arts Office Telephone: 044 9340781 Email: martina.finn@westmeathcoco.ie



An Post C Both Sides Exhibition

Featured in previous editions, this extraordinary and prescient project has now developed into an exhibition covering a pivotal year for Ireland. Curated by Helen Carey, the exhibition consists of postcards made by the general public along 12 monthly themes during 2008, sponsored by An Post and Westmeath County Council and is the original idea of Artist Edel O'Reilly Flynn and Westmeath Artist Teresa Doyle.

Drawing upon heritage themes and looking to the future; showcasing the wit, talent and insight of the Irish people, *An Post C Both Sides* will tour 6 regional venues, starting in Dublin Civic Offices on 30 March and finish in Westmeath's Mullingar Arts Centre from 13 - 31 July. Further information on www.anpostcbothsides.ie



Cups and Crowns tour schools in Laois and Offaly



Cups and Crowns presents Mamie's Cart

The Arts Offices in both Laois and Offaly County Council has offered primary schools in the counties the opportunity to avail of a visit by Cups and Crowns Educational Theatre Company to their school. The company will perform a play titled **Mamie's Cart** in different schools each day, during Monday 20th April to Monday 11th of May. This is the second year in succession that this collaborative project is running. On

Monday May 11th the play will be performed in Birr Theatre, where school groups who did not have the opportunity to receive a school visit, can see the production and avail of a talkback session and teacher resource packs.

The play tells the story of Bernard, who is a fixer, he loves to fix things. He believes that every nut has its bolt and that everything makes complete logical

sense, just like his life. Mamie sees the world in a completely different way...

For more details contact: Laois Arts Office 057 8674342/41
artsoff@laoiscoco.ie
Offaly Arts Office 057 9357400
artsoff@offalycoco.ie

More details on the theatre company can be found on their website www.cupsandcrowns.ie

A TASTE OF LITERATURE IN LONGFORD

For the second smallest county in Ireland with a population of less than 35,000 Longford boasts a thriving literary community with widespread participation in writing festivals, poetry readings, book clubs and writers groups. One of Irelands longest established creative writing internet websites www.virtualwriter.net is enjoying its tenth year on line and has just undergone a major facelift and restructuring. Through the website aspiring writers are actively encouraged to develop their talents and are provided with a platform to showcase their work. In addition, the recent upgrade includes a new multi-media section where the latest audiovisual presentations can be viewed.

In the past few months Longford Arts Office has been busy organising a full schedule of readings and book launches by local and nationally acclaimed authors. The season began with a school workshop and evening reading by one of the leading and most prolific figures on the Irish literary scene, Dermot Bolger, Dermot read from "The Family on Paradise Pier" and chatted easily with his audience of fans and aspiring writers.

This event was followed by a literary evening in the Bog Lane Theatre Ballymahon. Forming part of a series of nation-wide readings marking the 30th anniversary of Poetry Ireland, its aim was to raise awareness of the richness and diversity of contemporary poetry in Ireland and to showcase the work of local writers namely Kieran Furey, Mary Melvin Geoghegan and Kathy Rodgers.

The Bog Lane Theatre Ballymahon was also the venue for a master class for aspiring writers on how to get their work published. It offered practical advice on how to approach a literary agent or publisher which is of course, invaluable information for any aspiring writer. The guest speakers were Ciara Considine from Hodder Headline, Peter Fallon from Gallery Press and Faith O'Grady from Lisa Richards Agency.

A literary event that grows in popularity each year is the Longford Young Writer of the Year Competition. This is part of the development programme for creative writing throughout the county which aims to encourage children and teenagers to express their creativity in poetry and short stories. The winning entrants from all categories, as well as receiving prizes, had their work posted on the Youth Zone of www.virtualwriter.net prizes were presented by Longford writers Noel Monahan and Kathy Rodgers.

The literary events outlined above were only a taste of the varied and busy literary programme of events held in Longford throughout 2008. All in all, the enthusiasm for the written word and the wealth of literary talent which abounds here in Longford has made for an exciting twelve months. In a county with a literary heritage stretching back to Oliver Goldsmith and Maria Edgeworth it is clear that the craft of writing is still flourishing. Notwithstanding the doom and gloom of our current economic climate, it would appear that the compulsion to put pen to paper and transport us into the world of the imagination is in no danger of abating.

LAUNCH OF Joe Dolan Sculpture



"Taoiseach, local dignitaries and the Dolan Family at the unveiling of the Joe Dolan sculpture memorial in Mullingar on 7th Dec 2008".

Mullingar rocked to the voice of Joe Dolan one more time on Sunday 7th December 2008 as the Taoiseach, Mr. Brian Cowen T.D, unveiled the memorial sculpture to Joe. In what proved to be an emotional and celebratory afternoon, thousands flocked to the Market Square, Mullingar to witness the unveiling and to watch a segment of the Joe Dolan Reunion Show play live and on giant screens erected on the main street.

The afternoon commenced with Cllr. Michael Dollard, Cathaoirleach of Mullingar Town Council hosting a reception while The Mullingar Town Band entertained the gathering crowd.

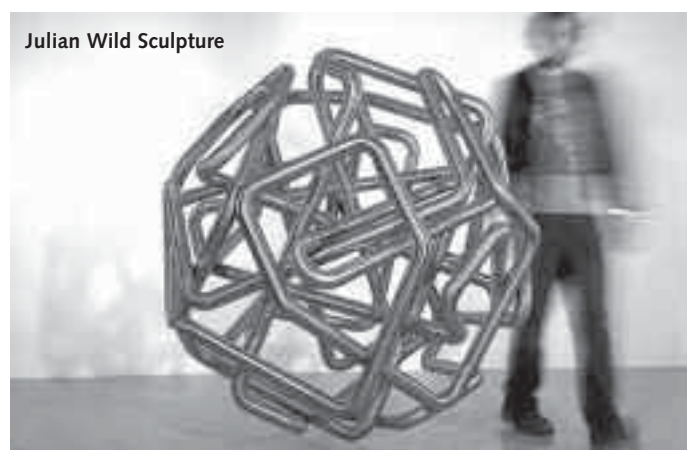
Cllr. Joe Whelan Cathaoirleach of Westmeath County Council formally welcomed everyone to Mullingar and spoke of the day as being "bittersweet, a moment to reflect and to celebrate" the life and times of Joe Dolan. Carl Payne in association with Genisis Fine Arts created the sculpture memorial and it is located in the Market House Square, Mullingar.

Lough Boora Sculpture in the Parklands

**Alan Counihan (IRL) and
Julian Wild (UK) have been
announced as the artists in residence
at Sculpture in the Parklands for 2009.**

Julian Wild is a graduate from Kingston University. He works in a diverse range of materials, from clay and glass through to stainless steel, where the physical possibilities of each material are pushed to its limit in the objects that he makes. In 2005 he was short-listed for the Jerwood Sculpture Prize and he has recently been commissioned to make public sculptures for: Millfield School, The Cass Sculpture Foundation, Crest Nicholson, Wyeth Europa, Schrodgers Investment Management, Radley College Oxford and The Jerwood Sculpture Park.

Alan Counihan has been working as a sculptor for almost 20 years. He has completed numerous public and private commissions both in Ireland and the US. He has engaged almost exclusively with stone, exploring the violent energy of granites and the settled quietude of limestone. More recently, perhaps to escape from the noise of quarries and the machinery associated with his work, he has begun to explore



bogland as a source of inspiration. "I have been exploring the possibilities of peat itself as a medium and am fascinated by the associated challenges. If stone is like bone, peat is like flesh, soft, amorphous and semi- liquid. I am only learning its physical secrets, the way it draws in on itself drying and shriveling over time as though in shocked reaction to its modelling."

For more information see www.alancounihan.com
www.sculptureintheparklands.com

SOUNDWAVES ROCKS

Three years ago, two musicians from Dublin, Nicola Lane and Karl Somers, decided to try bringing a new art making methodology to youth arts in the midlands. Using music as their foundation, they started up a 'rock school' on the Longford Westmeath border called **Soundwaves**.

The process they use is akin to 'taking a line for a walk', as the artist Paul Klee described his method for drawing. But in this case you could describe it as taking a groove for a walk! The way they teach is through song writing. The young (and sometimes old) folk are first given a foundation in the rudiments of their instrument be it drum, guitar or bass. Once they have a handle on the basics, they are encouraged to work on their own original material.

Like minded young musicians have also started to gravitate towards each other to form small armies of sound making! Some of these bands are now starting to make an impression such as Skullkandi. Another group in their embryonic stage (no name as at this point) is experimental trio, Peter Calanan, Fabian MacGinty O'Neill and Dave Perry, who Lane and Somers say are "unafraid to hook into a groove and push it to beyond the constraints of common sense".

One of the things they try to do is to foster confidence to play in front of, and with other musicians unselfconsciously. The idea that you can't *learn* without making mistakes is important, and if you can use them properly, mistakes can often lead to exciting new developments.

If you would like to find out more about **Soundwaves Rock School** contact 043 85919, 0877472563 or 0868647451



Belmont Mill

Belmont Mill Wins Award

Belmont Mill is delighted to announce that they have received the Best Site/Museum Award 2008 nominated by The Industrial Heritage Association of Ireland and sponsored by E.S.B. It is a great acknowledgement for the hard work and careful attention to detail which went into the restoration of the oat mill and the archival display in the museum.

Belmont Mill and Artist Studios is developing into a site of creativity, which is very much the vision of owner Tom Dolan. Throughout 2009, they will host many events bringing together a community of artistic endeavour. In May for the Bealtaine Festival Caroline Conway will work on a textile project called "a tree of life". The National Bursaries sponsored by the Arts Council of Ireland and Offaly County Council will bring 6 graduates and postgraduate artists from around Ireland to work for 3 months focusing on solo/group exhibitions to take place in the year ahead.

When the mill is open to the public (July to mid Sept) there will also be an exhibition programme; featuring printmaker Carolyn Conway, painter Leila Canney, ceramicist Isobel Egan, painter Rowena Keaveny, and printmaker Carol Kelly.

Rosemarie Langtry and Jennifer Comber who hold permanent studios will run painting and pottery classes for adults and children, including summer holiday camps. Contact Jennifer 087 7991866

Finally Belmont Mill would like to thank everyone who has attend activities and events at Belmont, by doing so it has support their effort to provide a vibrant campus of creativity within the wider community of the Midlands.

If you are looking for a venue to hold classes or you wish to rent a studio, please contact Tom or Sandy: 09064 57598, email: info@belmontmill.com or see www.belmontmill.com

Castlepalooza festival call for proposals

Castlepalooza is a two-day music and arts festival set in the historic Charleville Castle in Tullamore. This intimate festival, which takes place on Saturday 1st and Sunday 2nd August 2009, showcases a range of music styles from both Irish and international artists.

For 2009, Castlepalooza would like to further extend their programme to bring in more art exhibitions, installations, recitals, performances, workshops, and markets.

Castlepalooza is interested in hearing from dancers, writers, artists and craft workers in the Midlands who would like to take part in this year's festival. Please send a one page proposal along with supporting images to info@castlepalooza.com by Monday 23rd March 2009. Please put "Midlands Proposal" in the subject box.

Castlepalooza was shortlisted in the "Best European Festival" category at the UK Festival Awards 2008. See www.castlepalooza.com



Castle Palooza Festival 2008

Call for Artists Collaborative in Tullamore

A group of artists based in Tullamore are responding to the lack of any arts facility in the town, by seeing if they can come up with their own temporary solution. They are investigating the potential of the many vacant buildings in the town which could temporarily house studios, a gallery, offices, workshop spaces etc.

The group feels strongly that Tullamore needs to develop its cultural infrastructure, as the community is missing out on a quality life so badly needed these days.

They are also responding to the downturn in business in Tullamore, and feel that they need to highlight that economy and cultural activity are more closely linked than is realised in the town.

They are looking for more artists in the Tullamore, Offaly and Midland region to express their interest in being part of this artist led collaborative. For more information please email Niamh at troymluer@hotmail.com

Spring Series of Saturday Workshops in Belvedere House

Through Nine Waves

BELVEDERE HOUSE

FINN
Myths of Outlaw and Siege
Finn and the Plover

MACHA
Myths of the Godless
Danu, Macha and Brigit

CONAIRE
Kingship, Sovereignty
Cormac and Conaire

The Wonder of Ireland

Exploring the Timeless Heritage of Irish Myth

TERDA

BALOR

An exhibition of the great characters and the historical and mythical background to the Stories.

Experience the Timeless Heritage of Irish Myth
Contact: Backdrops at Belvedere House, Mullingar
Call 044 534 9100

Three Rivers Storytelling Festival

Liz
Weir



The **Three Rivers Storytelling Festival** takes place in June 2009, a month long celebration of the great traditional art of storytelling. Based in the East Galway Westmeath area, this annual festival features storytellers from Ireland, Europe and America. The festival features Irish tellers Liz Weir, Jack Lynch, Sue Brown, Fionnuala Mc Kinley, Danielle Allison and International tellers Pat Ryan (UK) Kasia Lech (Poland), Simone Schummerlfeder (Germany) and Liz Warren (USA) and many more.

Highlights of the festival include weekly performances for schools in The Aidan Heavey Public library Athlone, Ballinasloe Library and other East Galway Branches. Local playschools will also be treated to story telling sessions.

For the older audience they can enjoy 'Afternoon Tea', a storytelling circle session where stories are shared. Family sessions and an Adult Evening concert of music and tales will also take place in The Passionfruit Theatre at 8pm on Friday the 19th of June featuring acclaimed tellers Liz Weir, Liz Warren, Jack Lynch and guests.

For further details please contact; Danielle Allison 087 9592835 Festival Director, Mary Dillon 0909643464 at Ballinasloe library or Mae McLynn Athlone 0906442157

Ceilli Mor at Belvedere

Belvedere House, Mullingar is hosting a **Ceilli Mor** on Sunday March 15th, a fantastic combination of Traditional Irish Music and Dancing all day.

Starting at 1pm there is an Irish Dancing Display by **Scoil Rince Breffni**, featuring, traditional, competition and interpretative displays of Dance. **Mullingar Comhlitas Ceoltoiri Eireann** will play a variety of instruments and also include some sean nos singing. The highlight of the day will be a performance by **The Strawboys** including the infamous Brush dance. This is followed by the **BunBrosna Set Dancers** and more music from **Comhlitas**. For further information and to book, please contact; Belvedere House Gardens & Park Mullingar, Co. Westmeath; Tel: 044-9349060



Birr Photography Group Début Exhibition

The Birr Photography Group has recently been set up by amateur enthusiasts of photography, to exchange useful information on many aspects of the craft and art; to seek professional advice when possible; to help 'perfect' their hobby (which of course, is also their passion) and to enjoy positive company and to share constructive opinions in pleasant gatherings.

Tin Jug Studio is facilitating the gatherings, and at the end of January the group exhibited "WINTER" their first display of their photographic enthusiasm. Nearly sixty photographs were on display by the twelve members of the groups, with scenes from Birr Castle gardens to Lough Boora Parklands and the Bog of Allen as well as images from sea to mountain tops - though some of these had an abstract quality.

Having an exhibition so soon was a challenge for the group, as most had never shown anything publicly before but the standard of photography was highly complimented by local professional photographers. New members are welcome - from outside Birr too!

Also at Tin Jug Studio Kidzart, the popular children's art and craft classes are ongoing and other forthcoming artistic events include 'Chocolate Saturday' creative workshops for children, and 'Eat Art', drop-in lunchtime art tuition for adults, lunch included.

For information, details, bookings contact Rosalind Fanning 087 668 1783

JOHN KEATING at Mullingar Arts Centre

John Keating is exhibiting at the **Market House Gallery**, Market Square, Mullingar from **Thursday 26th Feb** until **Sat 21st March**

Born in Tipperary in 1953, John Keating studied at the Crawford College of Art, Cork, Trinity College, Dublin, Loughborough University, Leicestershire and on scholarship at The Arts Student League of New York. Keating has exhibited nationally and internationally including the U.S.A., Italy, Spain, Greece, Monaco and China. His work is included in private and public collections in Ireland, the U.S.A., Australia, Italy, Greece and England. Keating has guest lectured and tutored on the drawing studies course at the National Gallery of Ireland, NCAD, DIT and at the University of Pittsburgh, U.S.A.



Chrysalis Dance Company Performance and Workshop at Tuar Ard

Chrysalis Dance Company presents an exciting new production entitled **Ways You Wander** on 17th April in **Tuar Ard**. This triple bill incorporates three very different pieces: *Nurture*, *2 Seasons*, and *Ways You Wander*. Choreography is by Judith Sibley and Kerry Biggin, and it features music by John Spillane, American composer Justin Ryan and Vivaldi.

Chrysalis Ballet Dance Company, in partnership with Tuar Ard Arts Centre and Westmeath County Council Arts Office also offers an outreach education opportunity through pre-show workshops available to dance students in the area. Further information please contact Tuar Ard 0906482042 or email info@tuarard.ie For more information visit www.chrysalisdance.com



Introducing Our New Coffee
Morning

"Fun With Wool"



Every Tuesday Morning 10.30 - 12.30am.

Commencing Tuesday 3rd February

Come and join us - all you need to do is bring your knitting or crochet!!!

At: The Old Schoolhouse, Balinahowli, Athlone

For more details please call: (090) 6430222

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athlone & westmeath crafted design

LAOIS YOUTH THEATRE

Laois has 5 Youth Theatres throughout the county; Portlaoise, Mountrath, Rathdowney, Stradbally and Portarlinton. The Youth Theatres are run by the Laois Arts Office and are affiliated with the National Association of Youth Drama (NAYD).

Young people from ages 8 to 18 take part in weekly workshops, participate in festivals and exchanges throughout the country, as well as professional workshop and theatre visits.

The Youth Theatres are co-ordinated by Áine Stapleton, Fiona Kavanagh, Julie Duane, Siobhán Coffey and Shóna McDonald. As part of their work, the co-ordinators enjoy meeting regularly to discuss youth theatre strategies, exchange ideas and also to connect and communicate artistically in an atmosphere of mutual support. The co-ordinators are active participants of the "Skills Sharing Network" which is a collective of Drama Facilitators and Youth Theatre Leaders who meet bi-monthly throughout the country. Each network participant is asked, at their convenience, to host a half-day workshop session on a theatre subject of

Laois Youth Theatre Tutors and Assistants.
Photo by: Siobhan Coffey



their choice and be willing to arrange the venue for a workshop.

Áine, Julie and Siobhán hope to further integrate this notion of skill sharing and support by initiating an inter-exchange of theatre facilitator within the County Laois Youth Theatre framework. Please contact Catherine Simon on 086 874 7024 for further information regarding the network.

Portlaoise Youth Theatre took part in NAYD's New Stage programme and the group plans to perform one of the commissioned plays, "Understanding Marcus", locally in April 2009. Rathdowney Youth Theatre are currently devising a piece based on the music of Tom Chapin for the Open Day festival in

June 09 when Mountrath YT will also participate in the festival.

The co-ordinators and assistants, in conjunction with the Arts Office and the Dunamais Theatre are currently planning an Open Day style Festival in Dunamais Theatre on the 6th June. The Festival will showcase the youth theatres' work and host theatre workshops and events for the community.

Contact the Dunamais Theatre for bookings on 057 8663355.

For more information on Laois Youth Theatre contact the Arts Office, Laois County Council. Telephone 057 8674342/41.

The Goldsmith International Literary Festival

28th May to 31st May 2009

This year's theme will be '**Goldsmith: Poet, Dramatist and Novelist**' and consists of speakers, lecturers, panel discussion and national poetry competition (adults and children) Confirmed speakers include Dr Chris Wheatley, Washington USA, Dr Andrew Carpenter, UCD, Dr. Fergus O Farrell and poet Desmond Egan

Now in its 25th year the festival takes place in various venues all over 'Goldsmith Country' in the South Longford - Westmeath area. The festival it is the third longest running event of its type in the country and has established itself as one of the foremost and most highly respected schools of its type in Ireland. Further information www.goldsmithfestival.ie or contact Secretary, Anne Tully: (043) 71448 E: Secretary@goldsmithfestival.ie

All Ireland DRAMA Festival 2009



This year the RTÉ All-Ireland Drama Festival has a double celebration. The Drama Festival has been associated with the Dean Crowe Theatre for 50 years and this year is also the 50th Anniversary of the first performance of John B. Keane's 'Sive'. To mark this occasion, John B's son Billy Keane will officially open this year's festival on May 1st.

This year's All Ireland Drama Festival will take place from 1st May - 9th May, 2009 in the Dean Crowe Theatre, Athlone.

For further information visit
www.dramafestival.ie

To the wise and wonderful over 55's in Offaly

Offaly County Council, Arts Office, as part of the Bealtaine festival, would like to invite you to submit stories and memories based on the theme **OPEN DOORS**.

Bealtaine is the national festival celebrating creativity in older age which takes place each May and for the past number of years, Offaly County Council has compiled a programme of events for the month throughout the county. The national theme of Bealtaine for 2009 is **Go and Open the Door** from the poem, *The door* by Miroslav Holub. This year the Arts Office would like to compile a book that would be a permanent collection of stories and memories from older people across the county. There are some criteria for submitting entries.

- The entrant must be over 55 and living in Offaly
- The submission may be a fictional short story, an actual memory or poem
- The theme should be around the phrase **OPEN DOORS**
- Word count per entry is approx 200 - 2000 words.
- It is preferable that entries are typed and submitted by email; however handwritten entries will be acceptable, if clearly legible.

The book will be professionally edited and it is possible that not all submissions will be accepted, though every effort will be made to include all entries. **Deadline for Entries is Friday April 3rd at 5pm.** The book will be launched at the end of May during the Bealtaine festival. For more information on Bealtaine events in Offaly contact 057 9357400 or see www.offaly.ie/arts

BEALTAINÉ IN WESTMEATH 2009

Each year Westmeath County Arts Office has supported a number of workshops, performances and short-term artist in residence programmes throughout the County to celebrate Bealtaine.

Bealtaine has been extremely successful in promoting the participation of older persons in the arts and the celebration of creativity in older age. The festival promotes greater participation in the arts by older people as artists and performers, as event organisers and audience, everywhere from national institutions to local parish halls. It also encourages the celebration of work by older artists.

If you are considering organising a Bealtaine event or would like to participate in an event please contact the Arts Office at 044 9340781. Age & Opportunity coordinates and promotes Bealtaine nationally and you might also like to download the A&O Guidelines for Working with Older People in the Arts at www.olderinireland.ie

Westmeath Emerging Artists Exhibition

in **Mullingar Arts Centre**

Kindly supported by the Arts Council
and Westmeath County Council

Westmeath County Council presents its annual Emerging Artist Exhibition, featuring the work of this year's best and brightest students and graduates from the county in the Mullingar Arts Centre from 17th April to May 2nd including the work of Aishling Muller, Pamela Myers, Catherine Rock, Margaret Dolan, Laura Reilly and Aishling Bradley.

This exhibition is coupled with a mentoring strand by Artist and Curator Maria Kerin, who will act as mentor to the young artists and will be selecting works and curating the upcoming exhibition. Also participating in this

years emerging artist programme is Artist/ Curator Miriam Walsh see FIS Athlone

Westmeath County Council Arts Service is committed to promoting and nurturing the artistic talent of tomorrow and providing support and opportunities for emerging artists. Kindly supported by the Arts Council and Westmeath County Council.

Westmeath County Council presents its annual Emerging Artist Exhibition, featuring the work of this year's best and brightest students and graduates from the county, in the Mullingar Arts Centre from 16th April to May 2nd



Painting by Pamela Myers

Featuring the work of Pamela Myers, Aishling Muller, Catherine Rock, Margaret Dolan, Laura Reilly and Aishling Bradley.

Westmeath County Council Arts Service is committed to promoting and nurturing the artistic talent of tomorrow and providing support and opportunities for emerging artists".

Artists at Multyfarnham

A vision discovered and Shared

An Interaction between Artists and Friars on the theme of "Caring for Creation"

Next Residencies 2009

Monday 20th - Tuesday 21st

Wednesday 22nd - Thursday 23rd

Friday 24th - Saturday 25th

When participants arrive ground tea/drink on the Friars day and to dinner after Lunch on the last day.

The Friars have recently begun a unique two-week residency programme and are offering free accommodation and studio space to artists, writers, performers, ecologists, etc. who are willing to engage with the Franciscan community and discuss ideas and plans for the development of a "Caring for Creation Centre".

The mission is not limited to any one gender or belief system. The Friars welcome expressions of interest from all who feel they would like to participate. They hope that the conversations that occur as a consequence of interacting with creative people will generate ideas to aid in the evolution of their community and the growth of their vision at Multyfarnham.

The structure of the residency is shared/controlled by those who take part and their interaction with the Franciscan Community - there is no programme as such, though participants are invited to attend community prayer, meals and recreation. Each participant is invited free to structure the residency as seems best to them.

Those wishing to apply for a place on the residency are not required to forward any evidence of their work, nor are CV's or artistic statements required. All that is required is a willingness to take part as spontaneously and freely as possible, and a rich sense of joy.

Contact: Co-ordinator Paul Hynes
thynesw@wtdcc.com

Grants and Awards in Laois

ARTS ACT GRANTS 2009

This scheme is for organisations and individuals who meet the artistic and financial criteria set down by Laois County Council and who provide adequate information on their proposed activities. Maximum amount payable will not exceed €1000 and total payments will be limited to the overall budgetary provision for 2009.

ARTISTS PATRONAGE AWARD 2009

The Laois Artists' Patronage Award offers substantial financial support of up to €7000 to an artist residing in or originally from County Laois. The award is open to artists' in the following disciplines: dance, film, music, visual art, literature, and theatre.

TYRONE GUTHRIE RESIDENCY BURSARY AWARD

A bursary is available to enable a Laois artist to spend two-weeks working at the Tyrone Guthrie Centre in County Monaghan. The bursary is open to artists in all fields and selection is based on previous achievements and project/s in hand that may benefit from a two-week residency at this internationally renowned artist's workplace. For more information about the Tyrone Guthrie Centre see www.tyroneguthrie.ie

ARTISTS IN SCHOOLS SCHEME 2009

Grants are available for artists' residencies in schools, to include all art forms. This scheme gives primary and post primary schools the opportunity to select and work with professional artists and explore new arts media.

Drama League of Ireland Summer School Bursary Award

A bursary award is available to enable a drama enthusiast in county Laois to attend The Drama League of Ireland Annual Residential Summer School which runs from Saturday 1st -Saturday 8th August 2009. For information about the Drama League of Ireland see www.dli.ie

Details and application forms regarding the above schemes are available on request from:

The Arts Office, Laois County Council, Áras an Chontae, Portlaoise, Co. Laois. Telephone: 057 8674342

email: artsoff@laoiscoco.ie or can be downloaded from the website: www.laois.ie Closing date for receipt of applications for each scheme is **Thursday 19th March 2009**.

Grants and Awards in Westmeath

CATHAOIRLEACH'S AWARDS 2009



The members of Westmeath County Council initiated the Cathaoirleach's Awards Scheme to celebrate the work and successes achieved by individuals in the community and honour people in County Westmeath who have given special service in helping to create a strong and vibrant community.

The Cathaoirleach's Overall Winner in 2008 went to Hubert Magee (pictured) for his major achievements during 50 years at the helm of the Mullingar Town Band.

Westmeath County Council invites nominations from arts and community groups for the 2009

Cathaoirleach's Awards which will be announced at a Showcase Event on 30th April 2009 at Belvedere House, Mullingar.

For further information on all schemes and Artist Bursaries visit www.westmeathcoco.ie or contact Arts Office 044 9340781

GRANTS AND AWARDS IN OFFALY

Offaly County Council displays detailed information on all its grants and awards on www.offaly.ie. Upcoming deadlines in March and April include **Support for Artists Scheme** and **Drama Awards**.

These schemes are open to individual artists and drama groups in the county. For further details on your eligibility and an application form contact the Arts office on 057 9357400.

Opportunity for Artists Public Art Commissions

PRESENTATION PRIMARY SCHOOL

Station Road, Portarlinton, Co. Laois **BUDGET: €27,500**

Presentation Primary School under the Department of Education & Science, Per Cent for Art Scheme wish to commission a sculptural piece(s) of durable quality. The total fund awarded is €27,500 to include all fees, costs, transport and installation. This commission will be awarded by a two-stage selection process. At this first stage, the school invites initial expressions of interest from professional artists for this site/location specific artwork. At the second stage, artists will be shortlisted and invited to submit a detailed concept proposal for the final piece. The project is to be fully completed and the final piece/artwork installed by October 2009.

Closing date for receipt of applications is 30 March 2009.

Application forms and brief available from:
The Principal, Presentation Primary School,
Station Road, Porarlinton, Co. Laois.
Tel. 057 86 23007 E-mail: presprim.ias@eircom.net

SCOIL CHARTHAIGH NAOFA

Rahan, Tullamore, Co. Offaly **BUDGET: €16,000**

Rahan has a long history of education and monastic life, with St. Carthage founding a monastery in the 5th Century. Submissions are invited for a unique visual artwork to be sited inside or outside the new school. While the school has a broad outlook on proposals, for the purposes of clarity, the preferred artwork shall have permanency and a visual impact. An element of background research is needed to inform the proposal and information about the school can be found at www.scoilcharthaighnaofa.ie.

The budget for the design, supply and fix of this project will be €16,000 inclusive of all costs, expenses, VAT, insurance and other charges. The commission is a two-stage open submission process and applicants are invited to submit a preliminary proposal, CV and outline budget to:

Scoil Charthaigh Naofa, Rahan, Tullamore, Offaly.

Closing date for applications is 3pm Friday April 10th 2009

For a full copy of the brief see www.scoilcharthaighnaofa.ie or contact 057-9355393

Westmeath - Rural Arts Network Communities promoting the Arts

If you're a community group or individual in Westmeath who'd like to promote arts activity in your area or you're already promoting events locally then contact Martina Finn, Arts Officer or Conor O'Leary, email; artsnetwork@gmail.com and visit the website for further information on the Rural Arts Network at <http://www.webjam.com/ruralartsnetwork> or Caroline Moran, Westmeath Community Development

Contact Information

LAOIS

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Arts Officer,
Laois County Council,
Áras an Chontae,
Portlaoise, Co. Laois.
Tel: 057 8674344
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email: artsoff@laoiscoco.ie
website: www.laois.ie

OFFALY

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Aras an Chontae, Charleville Road,
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WESTMEATH

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This publication was coordinated by
Manchán Magan



Front Cover:

Sculpture in the Parklands, winter 2008
"Happiness" by Marian Jorgenson commissioned in 2005
photo by Kevin O'Dwyer

Back Cover:

Painting by Antoinette Breen
Photo by Andy Mason

Mark Garry, Being There, Mattress Factory, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 2008,
Photo courtesy of the artist

Legitimate Bodies Dance Company
Hanging in There – Nick Bryson and Damian Punch

midlands

artsandculturemagazine

a review of the arts in laois westmeath offaly and longford

