

**MIDLANDS  
ARTS AND  
CULTURE**

a review  
of the  
arts in  
laois  
westmeath  
offaly and  
longford

**WINTER  
2009**



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# Foreword...

I was thrilled when I met people around and about the country when I was giving creative writing workshops, or doing readings, or just being anywhere, and they said to me: 'I saw you were editor of the, "Midlands Arts and Culture Magazine"; well, I really enjoyed Seamus Hosey's conversation; or Neil Donnelly's story; or Mullahoran, and Longford's County Choir; or Ursula Meehan's art'; and many more such comments which brought home to me so forcibly how important the arts are to us all; and how they capture and enliven our interest, and lead us on to worlds unknown and enchanting. The arts can show us how to make sense of our lives.

Now, I feel very privileged to be editor again of this magazine which brings to our midland counties of Longford, Offaly, Laois and Westmeath, the stories and accounts of such a wide and exciting vista of creative events that take place on a daily basis for all age groups among us. I am also very humbled and honoured to be Laois Writer-in-Residence. I have begun workshops with young people and adults, and will be giving readings, and having chats with many people who dream of writing, - and if you are one, I hope I shall meet you - visiting many places all around my beloved home county.

Within these welcoming pages I hope you will find many creative events that will resonate with your own gifts. There are once again my journeys with: Laois writer, Pat Boran who gives unstintingly of his own gift of communication and lights

a way for so many people; Michelle O'Donnell, Architectural Glass Artist and Sculptor in Offaly, whose insight into the power of light, underwater and in the bog's everchanging mystical beauty, is eternally transformed in glass; Paul Timoney, Westmeath's artist, whose interpretation of life's serendipity is reflected in his representations of the hinterland of this county of legends; Mary Melvin Geoghegan whose journey to her own inspirational books in the Longford landscape of world-acclaimed writers, has also facilitated the making of many children's books in Longford.

There are accounts of: Children's Festivals; Literary Festivals; Drama Projects; Dance Festivals; Art Exhibition; The Saints and Scholars Sculpture on the new Tullamore bypass; Music Festivals; an interview with Declan McGovern; a major philanthropic gift for music; and many, many more exciting events and conversations within the pages of our magazine which I hope brings: the energy; the excitement; the affirmation; the comfort; the power of the arts in our midland counties of Laois, Longford, Westmeath and Offaly, straight to you and you will find yourself renewed and reinvigorated by the very warm, liberating and nurturing powers which involvement with the arts offers to every single one of us once we have found our way there. I hope this, 'Midlands Arts and Culture Magazine' is a beacon for you to our midlands arts.

**Ann Egan: Guest Editor**

**Muireann Ní Chonaill**  
Arts Officer, Laois County Council

**Sinead O'Reilly**  
Arts Officer, Offaly County Council

**Catherine Kelly**  
Arts Officer, Westmeath County Council

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

**Fergus Kennedy**  
Arts Officer, Longford County Council



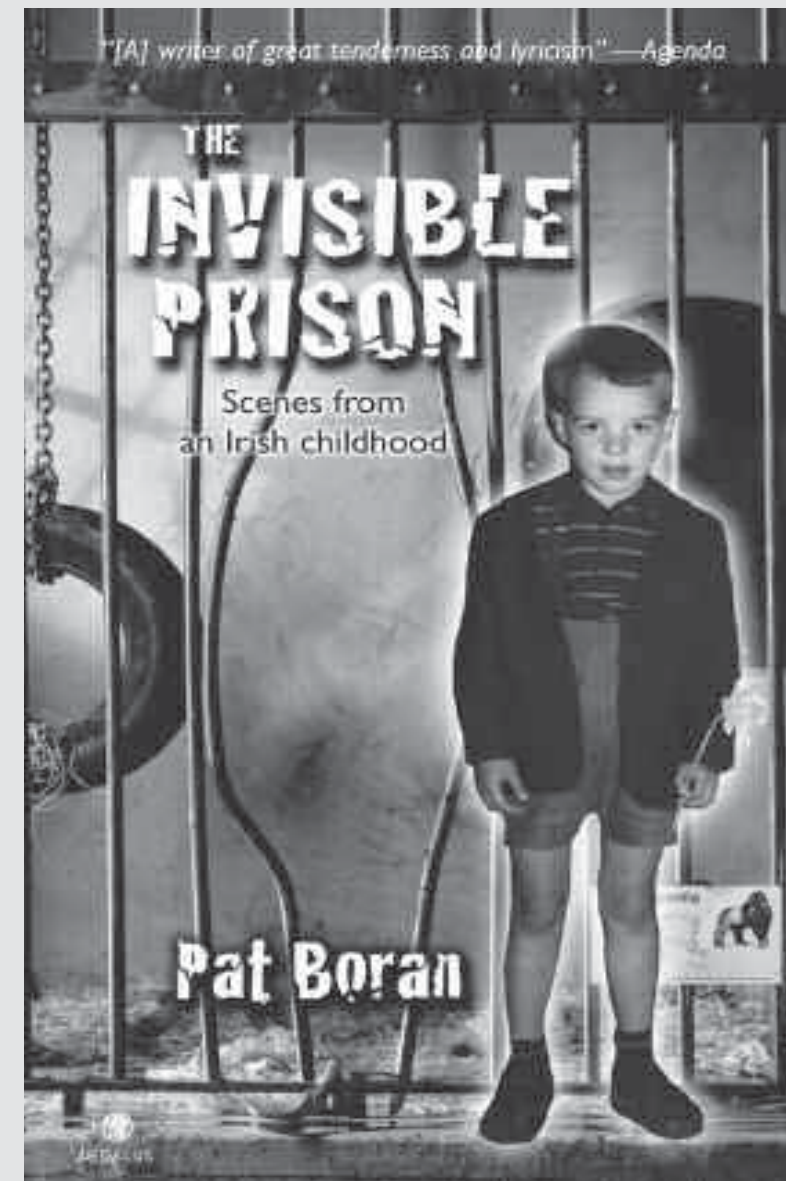
Ann Egan journeys with...

# PAT BORAN

Writer Publisher Broadcaster

**PAT BORAN TALKS ABOUT THE LAOIS ARTISTS PATRONAGE AWARD**

Writing, like any kind of artistic pursuit, can be a slow business. First there is often the necessity of undertaking research, of writing initial drafts which then have to be revised multiple times (in order for the writer to find something new and unexpected, something that makes the process more than mere psychic record-keeping). Then there is the challenge of time and distance: for there comes a time in the creative process where it is better to 'down tools' and do nothing at all than to keep poking and paring, trimming and remaking. If the writer, in the initial period of inspiration, must go completely with the flow, and trust in where it carries him or her, later in the process he/she must try to be as cold and objective in reviewing the material as the most critical reader is likely to be. To move from that initial trust to the later, necessary objectivity takes time.



In short, then, time is one of the things that an award like the Laois Artist Patronage Award can help an artist to afford, either one who is currently in hot pursuit of a goal, or one who is stepping back for a period from the coal-face in order to consider and evaluate what has been made or discovered earlier.

When I received the Award in 2006, I had been for some years working in the background on a prose volume which, I knew, had to do with my time living in Portlaoise, though that was as much as I was sure about. The Award enabled me to pull back a little from some other work and to surrender myself to the slow, often dull, and mostly unrewarding work of reading through old newspapers and files, of rooting through local history publications, etc, most of which proved to be of no great immediate worth - though they did help me to project myself out of where I was to where I was trying to re-imagine.

In the summer of 2005 ( that is , before receiving the Award) I had the near-devastating experience of leaving the manuscript of an earlier version of, 'The Invisible Prison' on an Alitalia flight in Milan's Malpensa airport, where I was transferring to a flight to Dublin. For some reason, though I have written and published many books at this point, this was the first I had decided to write entirely by hand: I suppose I hoped I would get closer to some kind of unmediated voice that every writer is hoping for. In the end, it was a mistake that cost me dearly. For every time I tried to steel myself to begin again, or to remember what I had written the first time, the enormity of the challenge stopped me in my tracks.

In many ways, receiving the Award the following year gave me the opportunity to start over. Writers, like most artists, work in solitude and their work is generally received in solitude, so there is also another level of importance to awards like the Laois Artists Patronage Award in that it gives writers and artists some kind of feedback from the community of which they are part, though they may often wonder what it is about their work that has relevance and meaning beyond them.

Writing and making art of almost any kind, however much it refers to its surroundings, is also a kind of interior travel and, while one is on the road, it is necessary to keep the many wolves from the door. To this end, the Laois Artists Patronage Award is a kind of silver bullet: though the amount of money it brings will not bankrupt a well-run local authority, it nevertheless represents for many artists, myself included, a considerable percentage of the sub-average-industrial wage on which most artists, professional or semi-professional exist.

It is therefore not just a welcome feature of the Laois arts scene of recent years, but a recognition of the worth of something which though it cannot be bought cannot be done without: a sense of self and of community, and, acting like an ever-swaying rope-bridge between the two, the imagination.

**Pat, will you tell me a little about your writing, your new book, 'The Invisible Prison', and where the idea of it came from?**

Well, I suppose, like a lot of people writing poems, a lot of mine would have been somewhat connected to childhood or would be about the time I spent living in Portlaoise and in Laois in general. And in recent times, partly for experiment and for distraction, you know, in the last four or five years maybe, I'd started to write some of those ideas for poems - that didn't maybe entirely come off or were too anecdotal. I'd started to write them as short prose pieces. At some stage, then, when enough of those had accumulated, the idea for the book came out of that. And part of it was when I started to broadcast some of them particularly, I got such a response for them ... I don't know... it was in some ways because they were very low-level and very identifiable with the town of Portlaoise; and in another way a lot of the response was coming from people who had never been to Portlaoise, who didn't know anything about Ireland, maybe. And I think it was just that whole idea of the small town.

The place that's not quite countryside and not quite urban or citified, just one of those liminal zones, if you like. So really that's where the idea for the book came from; for putting these small, short pieces which, in my mind, are kind of built in the same way as one would build a poem around an image or two and a small detail. None of them individually, I think, are very exciting. They're not about big events at all. And I think that was my determination at the start - that I wasn't necessarily going to write a memoir, which might be something I'd do when I'm older, but I was going to go back to a series of small events and see what happens when you stick them all side by side.

**How long did it take you to write, 'The Invisible Prison'?**

Well, I've been doing it over a few years. I lost the original version of it. And then I was so annoyed with myself and disappointed that I gave it up for awhile and then I started again. So I suppose the most recent version of it has been going on and on for over three years or thereabouts. But my job, my day job, so to speak, in publishing has taken and takes up a lot of time and if there are books, as there are, there are three books coming out between now and Christmas as well as my own. So in the latter part of this job, it was quite hard to finish it because I was constantly being distracted by something else. And that's the difficulty- I think

if you are the person who signs off on the book, it's difficult to just walk away from it.

But you know, I suppose I was just literally finishing it, or trying to finish it the night it went to the printers, which is not a way I'd normally work at all. I'd have things finished for months, have them in a drawer somewhere and let them cool down, and come back and read them cold. So in every sense it was just a different way of working. But as I say a lot of the pieces were originally written as short, stand-alone things for radio. So I think they come across as if they were spoken as much as if they were written. And I think that that makes them a bit more accessible for people who are not necessarily inclined to read literary books, if you like. I don't think - I hope it's not too literary an effort and that it would be inclusive rather than exotic, let's say.

**What are your views on memoirs and on, 'The Invisible Prison'?**

Most memoirs are about people who are famous for something, and then you read all about the childhood to find out what makes them who they are. Now, I don't think that that's the case with this book at all because (a) I'm not famous, and (b) I didn't have a terribly interesting, in that sense, childhood. And I think that's what is interesting about the book - or what I hope is - that it's a way of looking at a childhood; it's not the childhood that happens to be fascinating, it's how you deal with it.

Most of us don't have extraordinary, highscale, celebrity lives and most of us don't want them. And it doesn't mean that our lives, our existence, our thoughts, the events that happen to us, are not meaningful, you know. But contemporary culture seems to suggest that unless you are someone in the public eye all the time you are of no value which is an awful perversion and corruption of the truth. And I think, to get serious about it for a second, I think that that's what the book is really about.

I hope when somebody reads this — you know, coming back from a radio interview the other day, the taxi driver had been listening to the piece on the radio, and all the way back he talked to me about his childhood because it connected to things; then he'll go home and he'll talk to somebody else about it. And we were talking about the most minute and in a sense, mundane details. But that's what life is made of, and I think people should be encouraged to treasure those small things, because without them, the big things mean nothing.

**Do you think, 'The Invisible Prison' may unlock the way for young men to speak about their lives?**

Well, that would be a fantastic thing. I mean it's a difficult one to approach because there is no one kind of template that's going to help or suit everybody. But certainly, I think the fact that the book doesn't glamourise anything; it doesn't offer any easy kind of entertainment; it doesn't shy away from simple stories and small hurts. I think it - if you can get to the stage in your life where you can talk about the small hurts openly, there is some chance that you could enter the room of the big hurts, you know, and the big pains, especially for young men. I think that you're absolutely right if that conversation is not going on around them, they're very unlikely to suddenly start it themselves.

And in that sense, I think any kind of storytelling that has a foundation in emotion as well as in fact, has a chance of being useful to somebody. And I mean that has to be it; as I said already what's important, if you

think about it, it's not that it's my childhood, it's that it's a childhood that's actually very close to that shared by hundreds of thousands of people around the country and over generations, about which most of those people have been unable to talk and to discuss, you know unfortunately the people who've had the worst time in the country at the hands of - whether it be clerical abuse or whatever we have finally started to listen to the people.

But people who are living lives between the extremes of absolute horror and absolute happiness which is most people, have no way to discuss and are not encouraged to discuss those small details. So I think really that's what it is, and if it does prove to be helpful or useful or start conversations or debates or whatever with people, I think that would be a wonderful thing.



Ann Egan journeys with...

# Michelle O'Donnell

## ARCHITECTURAL GLASS ARTIST AND SCULPTOR

### Michelle, will you tell me a little about your life?

I was born in Lifford in Co Donegal. I came from a family of five. I'm second eldest. After local secondary school, I went on to The Limerick College of Art to do the Foundation Course in Art and Design. Then I went on to do a degree in the University of Ulster. I did a degree in Fine Art and Design. Then I spent some time working for glass companies on a contract.

### What brought you to glass?

From university, I was intrigued with the colours in glass. In the Channel Islands in Jersey, in the summer when I was working there, I used to spend quite a lot of time diving underwater. I noticed the bleeding of colours together underwater - the vibrancy of the colours. Now, it's the colour and texture that's found in the landscape; but water is the main source.

### What is the difference of colour found in the water and in the landscape?

It's the pureness of it. It's pure vibrancy. I worked in Dallas in Texas, I worked for a crystal company. I developed a range of once-off pieces for the American market. When I came home, I set up my own business, 'Glasshammer'.

### Where did that name come from?

Just when I was training - on the fishing boats - back in the Channel Islands - I used to be sent for a sky hoop or a skirting ladder, and a glasshammer.

### Where did you set up your company?

At the back of The Point Depot. I worked making commissions there for a number of years, until I got a big break. I got three very large commissions in a row. It was over two years' work. One of them was stacked- glass, standing towers in water in Dublin's Grand Canal Plaza. The second one was Stein House at the top of Harcourt St, joining the new building with the old Georgian building. It's called, 'Flock'. The third one was a very large private commission in a home in Italy. With these three very large jobs, we moved to County Offaly and we bought a field in County Offaly, in Rhode. We built our workshop. Then we started off specialising here on large scale, architectural commissions for all over the world.

### How did you choose County Offaly?

My husband is from the area. He used to ride out on Saturday mornings in Rhode. I came down with him one Saturday



Michelle O'Donnell

morning, and we met the family. Subsequently we bought a field in the area and built a workshop. We're here for nine years now. It's a wonderful place. It's set on twenty five acres of field, and has a river - a tributary of the Boyne. It's a beautiful place and wonderful for rearing children.

### What is a typical day for you?

Get up, get the kids - I have three children. Emer is nine. Seánóg is six. Charlie is two. They go to the school locally, a wonderful school - Ballybryan. Then I get on with my work. My workshop is across the field. I set about working on, nice and slowly, the job that I'm working on. I find that glass has a particular rhythm that you can't rush. It doesn't allow you to rush it, and you have to work in that rhythm. I find that most - it's time consuming, but if you rush it, you just can't, so when I come over here, I have to get into that rhythm. I set about crushing the glass and colouring it and heating it and preparing it to go into the kiln. I usually work with templates. My work is very fluid and I have quite a painterly approach - so that the finished art work has movement and moment. I think you can see that movement and moment with both the colour and texture and design of the pieces. I tend to do commissions in multiples. I do several smaller pieces that make up one large piece. Like a shoal of fish that moves across the wall in a fusion of colour. A lot of the work is bold - it's really quite bold and demanding of the eye.

### When you begin your work, do you already know what you are going to do?

Yes. I do know. I'm working on something, but you never know the thousand of little decisions you make along the way.

### Are you always inspired?

Constantly. That's the joy of being an artist. I would hate to live a life that you're not constantly inspired by the beauty around you. Some smallish thing like: the colours in the bog; the blacks and the gold; to the layers and layers of branches you see when you look at forestry; to the vivid green moss on your fence.



Bray Court House,  
Co. Wickow

### When you are inspired, say outdoors, do you keep the image in your head, and how do you transfer it to a glass image?

I keep it in my head. I create the essence of the image; the spirit of the image; not necessarily the actual image.

### About how many hours do you work in a day?

I would spend 8 to 10 hours. Some days you can't do anything. You just have to stop and look at what you've done and live with the consequence and see how it works.

### What would you say to anyone who would aspire to be a glass artist?

I'd say it's a blessing. I feel it's a blessing to work with colour, and to be asked to make beautiful pieces for people. Some people don't know what they want. But when I visit them, and look at the space, then I know what they need. I feel that's an art form in itself.

### Do you show in galleries?

I do. I show in Ireland: in the Portfolio Gallery in Frances St. I show in the Eblana Gallery in Baggott St. Both sell very well for me, thankfully. We also have a gallery in, 'The Sandra Aylesbury Gallery', in Toronto, Canada. We're currently talking to a gallery in Los Angeles about showing the work there. But we're also opening a studio gallery here called - 'The Open Studio Gallery', - an informal space where people can come and look at what's actually being made; as it comes out of the kiln; a browse through a selection of new work. I'll be open to the public by appointment. The opening is in the first week of December. **Our grand opening is on the 4th of December.**



Raheen National School

### You already have art in private collections abroad. Are your pieces in collections here in Ireland?

Yes. We are blessed with having some wonderful, prestigious clients that have given us the opportunity of introducing our work into private collections both at home and abroad.

### How do you find County Offaly for your art?

I love County Offaly but I still have to escape to County Donegal every so often.



Athy Swimming Pool

Ann Egan journeys with...

# Paul Timoney

## ARTIST

### Paul, will you talk a little about your early life?

I grew up in Mullingar. I always knew from an early age that I would pursue Art in some way. I went to St Mary's, but after third year I went to Rochfortbridge.

### How did you know you would pursue Art?

For some reason, I always remember that association, even from other people - they would say, 'He was the smart one', about anyone of my older brothers; and, 'He is the artist', about me. I'm really troubled about that word, but that's what I do remember. The connotations of that word is ...'I am an artist,' is difficult for me to say. It's O.K. for other people to say that. I feel it's almost like someone saying, 'I'm a handsome person'. It's all right for other people to say that, while it's not all right for the handsome person to say it.

### Did the school in Rochfortbridge influence your art?

Well, what is really important is that there was an Art Centre established in Mullingar about 1991. I was aged 16 or 17. There is where I had my first piece of work on exhibition at one of their shows. It was a drawing with ink on a stick, of a pile of clothes on a chair.

### What did having a piece exhibited mean to you?

It was quite exciting and nice to feel a sense of support from the Arts Centre. The director was Brian Harten.



The name of the exhibition was, 'Art-Us'. I was the youngest person exhibiting. I did Art in Rochfortbridge. At home I always drew a lot. I went straight to Art College after school. NCAD. I did the foundation year of Graphic Design. I wasn't so cuckoo about that, so I left it. I did become very involved with theatre in Galway. I was acting and writing. I was quite into making things for the performances. I was with different community groups. Then I did some street theatre. Sometimes I made it up. I wrote a rhyming play that I've turned into a story more recently. It's called, 'The Teller's Tale'. I did make an illustrated version of it once, but I've redone it. I'm quite keen it's something to make into a book. I think I'd like to share it with people.

The next that happened was I did return to Graphic Design in NCAD. But I wasn't able to pursue it because I had a serious condition that affected my sight. I was involved in the theatre and performances a lot at this stage. When I got much better, I began to draw a lot more. The balance swayed back into visual art and I went back to college.

I moved into a different department, the Educational Department. I trained to be an art teacher. I loved that. I thought it was tremendous. I really enjoyed that degree. I liked the balance between teaching and having plenty of time to make work. They were mainly joyful years. I enjoyed them. When that was finished, I moved back to Mullingar. I was there



for about a year and I got a scholarship to do a Masters in The Burren College of Art.

It was really a funny series of coincidence that made that happen. I was working at the time with The Irish Society of Autism, and I had a studio in Mullingar as well. There was a holiday organised for two of the guys I was working with, and it was in the Burren. I wasn't meant to go on it. The person who was, couldn't make it. I took his place at the last minute. We were staying at a cottage in Ballyvaughan. We decided we wouldn't do any cooking, so we rang a nearby hotel. I went down to collect the food. But it wasn't ready. They asked me to sit at the bar and have some tea. The barmaid said to me, 'You must be here with the Art College'. So I found out there was an Art College down the road in a beautiful location, in the west of Ireland, in the middle of The Burren. Then I went up there the next day to take a look at it.

The secretary assumed I was applying for a course, and said, 'You know you have only one more week to get your application in.' Had it not been for that I wouldn't have applied. When I got home, I put together a CD of images, a little biography very quickly, sent it off, did an interview. They told me I was in and got a scholarship. I spent two years there. It was a tremendous time. I loved it. It was two years of just focussing on making work and it was just nice. It just felt like a very fortuitous part of a process, that to some extent has always been quite wonderful. I am very thankful that it happened.

### What did you do after that?

It leads straight to now. I came back to Mullingar. I was making work for a show in Galway. I needed a big space. I found there was a big space in Multyfarnan Abbey. When I got there I met Fr Joe (Walshe) - a Franciscan. He thought I was there to take a studio - another weird assumption. He gave me the key to the back door of the Agricultural College. I could go in and out as I pleased. Fr Joe is an artist himself.

Having that space allowed me to make lots and lots of things. I found stuff lying around that nobody wanted. So I suppose being there was a big influence.

### Paul, will you talk to me about your Art?

I think one of the most important things about my Art is using things that are close to hand, what is available in the now. If I have an idea, I try to realise it as quickly as possible and accept the limitations of the reality that presents itself. It feels



sometimes as though reality is part and parcel of the idea. It makes sense to use it. That also impacts on the way I draw because I like to wait for a moment when something wants to be drawn and then let it happen. I try not to judge it too much. That doesn't mean that my drawings are very fleeting and quick. Sometimes the motivation behind the drawing can be a very slow energy, something that wants to evolve very gradually. To some extent the way that I draw is inspired by the approach that I sometimes witness when working with children, or with people with special needs. I think that what is important is that they tend not to be stilted by their own judgement constantly. In a way that is where real, beautiful things tend to happen.

### Paul, what are you working on at the moment?

The method of trying not to judge helps me to make the illustrations for the book - 'The Tellers Tale'. I would have begun the drawings without knowing what image I was going to make. I want to share this work with as many people as possible.

Ann Egan journeys with...

# Mary Melvin

## Mary, will you tell me a little about your growing up?

I grew up in Glasnevin in Dublin. I'm the eldest of a large family. My father was a farmer but we lived in the city. So we had both worlds. After I left the, 'Holy Faith School', in Glasnevin, I went to Paris as an au pair. I discovered Beckett when I was in Paris.

## How did that happen?

I was studying French in the Institute Catholique, and my teacher was passionate about Beckett. I discovered that Beckett lived in Paris. I went to his plays whenever they were on. The Shakespeare Book Company, opposite Notre Dame, owned by an American, used to have visiting writers and poets. I used to go there. I'd listen to poets and writers reading in English. I wasn't writing at all. But that incubated in me at some level.

I came back after two years. I got a job in the IIRS – 'The Institute of Industrial Research and Standards' - as a translator. I went on to become a manager of, 'The Mobile Technical Unit.'

By night I did extra-mural courses on Beckett and Joyce and O'Casey. I was also a student in, 'The Young Dublin Players'. I did an acting course with, 'The Brendan Smyth Academy,' - 'The Abbey School of Acting'. Gabriel Byrne was a fellow student.

Back in Holy Faith, I had gone to school with the novelist, Mary McCarthy, and artist, Breda Haugh. We were friends and still are. The Arts were our leisure and I found a home in the Arts.



# Geoghegan Poet

## What was your next stage along the way to writing?

I got married and moved to Longford. My husband is a veterinary surgeon, and I was completely absorbed in managing the practice. My children came along. For us, 'Longford Local Library', was very important. Rural Ireland at that stage was very quiet.

The library was always a place of interest. As my children started to grow, I brought them to art exhibitions in Dublin, the bookstores, anything cultural.

When my son, Peter, was seven, he said to his teacher - Sr Angela Bracken, 'My mother just loves books!' Between managing the practice and being a mother, I was a very avid reader. When I heard the poet, Breda Sullivan read, something entered my consciousness that belonged. Breda was very helpful to me. At the same time that I met Breda, I joined a writers' group. The friends I made there, with me, joined Hayley Fox Roberts as part of, 'The Longford Writers' Group'. I started writing then. The poet, Noel Monaghan very kindly wrote a critique of my poems. I read Noel's poetry, and I got the economy of language, and the synthesising of feeling. Poetry for me is the distillation of being through the fire of focus.

## Will you talk to me about your first book?

My first book – 'The Bright Unknown' – was published by Lapwing Publications, Belfast in 2003. We had a writer-in-residence, Paul Perry, organised by Fergus Kennedy, Co Longford Arts Officer; he suggested when he saw my poems that I contact Lapwing.

From there I started working as a writer-in-schools. I did my first anthology of children's poetry, from County Longford, funded by Longford Community Resources, called, 'Ride Along Dear Grandma'.

Carmel Fallon invited me to give a workshop. Working with children was a revelation. Helping young people grow confident in the power of their own imagination and to trust it.

I gave workshops at, 'The Boyle Arts Festival'. I was guest poet to Force 12 in Belmullet, invited by poets –Kate and Joan Newman.'Abbeycarton Epiphanies'- was published in 2005 with Lapwing. 'When They Come Home'- was published in 2008 by Summer Palace Press. I also did a collection of poems –' A Hand in the Future'- from Stonepark National School. Every child wrote a poem. Belinda McKeon, past pupil, wrote the foreword. I am now working on - 'Poems from the Wild, Wild West' - poetry from 5th and 6th class at Ballinamuck National School.

## Can you tell me about your writing day?

The moment when I settle down to write is the most real; the moment can arrive at any time. Usually a line comes and the thing becomes urgent. My own writing life – writing time can happen at any time when I reconnect back to myself. Whenever poems come from the writing that will be urgent and I will attend to it.

## If a poem calls you, do you always answer its call?

I do. I have to. It won't leave me alone. I can't abandon it, it has to be resolved.

## In your busy life as a writing facilitator in: schools; colleges; writers' groups; Maynooth University - what do you do, if the poem calls you in their midst? How do you manage?

Once I write down the line that comes - I always carry a writing book with me - I can refer back to that line later, and I'll see what the poem has to tell me. You are always only as good as your next poem. I'm always afraid if I don't honour The Muse when she visits, I won't be able to call her back.

## So, Mary, no matter how busy or involved you are with other people's writings, you always honour your own?

I am a catalyst for others to source their own inspiration; and my work is separate. There are two spaces in my head – as a facilitator and as a writer. One nourishes the other.

Two quotes I use are – W.H. Auden : 'Poetry does not make things arise, it makes things ours'.

The critic – A.A. Gill: 'Poetry is the scalpel of emotion and the anvil of thought. It whispers and it bellows the unsayable with mere words.' I say to children –'Poetry is writing magic. Between the spaces words collect each other.'

## Do any of your children write?

They both write. My eldest son, Peter Geoghegan, is a journalist. His first novella –' Numen Adest' - was published by Lapwing in 2003; and his next book will be published by, 'The Review of Irish Studies,' NUI Galway. He is the editor of, 'New Political Insights.' My second son, Robert, is a musical reviewer.

# Aisling Children's Festival 2009

Longford's Aisling Children's Arts Festival is a county-based celebration of children's art. It is an invaluable opportunity for the children of Co. Longford to experience, experiment and become exposed to the varied and diverse forms of the arts. The 12th annual event has just successfully ended. We promised that the children of Longford would not be disappointed with the line-up that we had for this year's Aisling Children's Festival, and they weren't!

Despite bad weather and a difficult funding environment the Festival Committee was delighted to once again have Chris Thompson and Doug Fox Roberts on board to help with the Aisling Theatre Project. Students from Cloontagh National School and the Gaelscoil looked forward to returning to school in September as they were chosen to participate in this year's project. The project involved the children from both these primary schools writing their own play which they had then staged in the Backstage Theatre during the festival. Harold the snail who loves to bake, and Sophie who likes to spend her days looking after her flowers and blowing bubbles, provided a wonderfully entertaining experience for the younger children.

Renowned photographer, Lujé Daniels returned to the festival for a third year to teach students from Colehill National School and Ballinallee National School the art of photography. Luke also helped them prepare for their own photography exhibition during the festival in the Atrium Gallery.

Keeping with the digital arts, we were delighted to have worked once again with Kevin and Frances from the New Media Institute. Last year, Ardscoil Phádraig, Granard and St. Mel's College, Longford benefitted hugely from the project which culminated in a film premier in each school in December last year.

The students from the two Transition Year Classes in Scoil Mhuire, Longford participated in this year's unique project. They were taught filming and production techniques and produced an 'Exposé' type programme.

## Hullabaloo!

Kids had a hell of an arty time this Hallowe'en.

The 3rd Annual Children's Art Festival, Hullabaloo! took place in Birr Theatre & Arts Centre from Wednesday 28th to Saturday 31st October. There were over 35 workshops in 8 venues throughout the town, and it certainly lived up to its promise to be a highly entertaining event for all participants, children and parents alike.

Sessions included: Dance; Art; Crafts; Circus Skills; Storytelling; a number of Live Performances; Kids Photography; Writing Scary Stories; and Puppet Workshops.

There was also: a Dream Garden – an ultraviolet garden with alien flowers and glowing insects and birds; a special



For the more physically energetic among us, there was no need to travel to Killary Adventure Centre to experience mountain climbing! This year for the first time, we brought the climbing wall to Longford ensuring that both parents and children competed on the Family Day in St. Mel's College to see who scaled the greatest heights! The Aisling Children's Arts Festival continues to be the biggest children's festival of its kind in the midlands. Though it is run on a purely voluntary basis, it has for the past twelve years delivered a programme of creative activity for children and teenagers in every parish in Longford, and in so doing it successfully overcomes the biggest single challenge facing all such events in rural Ireland, and that is the dispersal of the audience combined with poor to non-existent public transport.

After a short break to enable us to recharge our batteries, the committee will be back in harness facing all of these challenges again organising the 13th Aisling Children's Arts Festival 2010. The show must go on!



Pig a Walley Ranger All Star Show

Hallowe'en Scary Photographic Tour; and a Children's Exhibition of project work, completed by local primary schools 5th and 6th classes, as part of a competition organised by Birr Library. Two Children's Short Films were shown: *Peter & the Wolf*; and *Lost & Found* in Birr Theatre & Arts Centre, whilst the Hallowe'en Party in Birr Castle rounded off this year's festival. Offaly's Children's Arts Festival was kindly supported by: Offaly County Council; Birr Theatre & Arts Centre; the Arts Council; and it also acknowledged the assistance of Birr Town Council and Access Cinema.

# Youth Work Ireland Laois

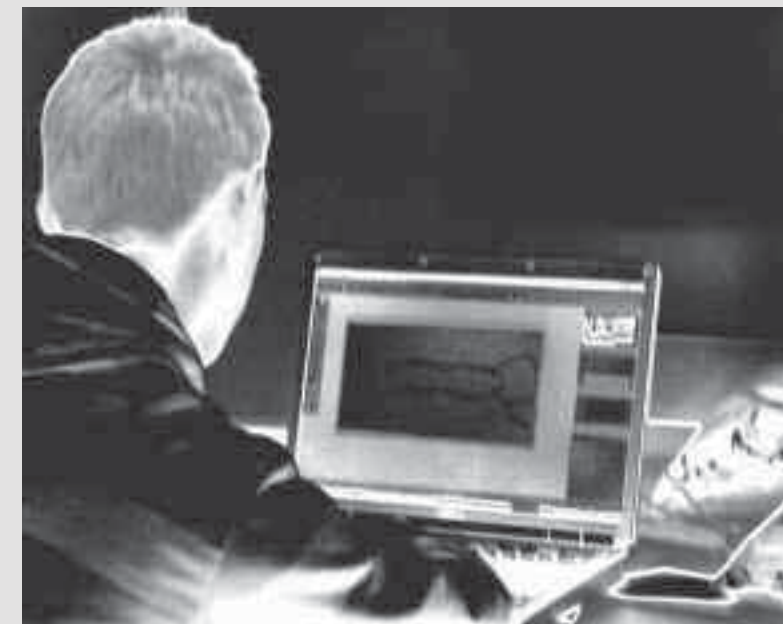
Youth Work Ireland Laois is delighted to become involved in Midlands Arts & Culture Magazine Autumn / Winter Edition 2009. Our organisation has worked tirelessly over the last year to promote and support the arts within the Youth Community in Portlaoise and throughout Laois. Our Arts focus over the last year has increased greatly due to our committed Youth Arts Worker, Aishling Hennessy; Youth Worker, Aoife Walsh; Office Co-ordinator, Nicola Coss; and Project Manager, Joe Thompson.

We started with Haunted House Project '08, which saw over 50 young people, aged 13-17 from all over Abbeyleix participating, and was a massive success. Props were made, costumes were designed, sets created and performances rehearsed. In January, we saw the first of our Youth Arts Programme '09 take place. All workshops were kindly supported by Portlaoise Credit Union and Laois County Council.

Animation workshops started in January with innovative work produced by the participants! From skydiving monkeys to martial arts men, the characters created by the group became a great insight into technical minds of our youth and their ability to demonstrate their computer graphics capabilities.

Photography, Painting and Ceramics workshops took place from March to April '09 with a great reaction from the young people of Laois. Painting workshops allowed the young people to display their individuality through the medium of paint while also using mixed media to create texture and depth. Ceramics workshops saw Ceramicist Eleanor Swan from Kildare work with us. The ceramic pieces created were beautifully sculpted, glazed and exhibited. Youth Work

Ireland Laois officially opened its door to the public with the launch of D' YOUTH FACTORY on 20th June. To coincide with this event, we set about displaying to the greater community the artistic abilities of the young people involved with us through "The Tunnel". This piece of Graffiti Art was created in the archway between The Fruit 'n' Nut Place and Portlaoise Pharmacy. These workshops brought together over



30 young people. The workshops were facilitated by Athy Artist, Ben Pateman and Portlaoise Artist, Alan Scully. Stomp Music workshops took place for two weeks in July with participants creating their own music instruments with the facilitation of local musician, Ross O'Meara.

Our final blast of energy came about through 5 young people's determination to have a Rock Garden Party on the 20th of August. The young people demonstrated not only artistic abilities but also maturity, friendship, team work, organisation and above all else a sense of responsibility for each project's success. To witness this, should prove to the sceptics that young people really can contribute positively to our community and their openness and free spirit should be characteristics we embrace, not diminish.

If you are interested in becoming a volunteer with us, or you are interested in upcoming workshops, please call into us at Abbeyleix Road, Portlaoise.

For more info contact 057 8665010 or visit the

website [www.ywilaois.ie](http://www.ywilaois.ie)

Article compiled by Aishling Hennessy Youth Arts Worker





## OFFALY DRAMA PROJECT '09

In 2003, in the absence of any professional theatre in the midlands, the Offaly Drama Project brought together performers from a number of local amateur groups for a county-wide production of, 'The Marriage of Figaro'. Financially supported by the Offaly Arts Office and given a home in the Birr Theatre and Arts Centre we were able, at last to do what we love best – making theatre.

With an emphasis on design, beautiful costumes and the best acting we could muster, we brought in professional mentors from the worlds of directing, design, actor-training and lighting to work with the cast and crew over a nine-month period of workshops and training before entering into final rehearsals. That project became the start of what is now known and established as the Offaly Drama Project.

Three projects later and we have a wonderful core team, an excellent relationship with a growing band of respected mentors who now know where Birr in Co Offaly is! We also have a growing and loyal following/audience.

For the first time now we are heading into the unknown territory of devising our own piece, in collaboration with a playwright, Michael James Ford and a professional director, Bairbre Ní Chaoimh. Michael has been commissioned by us to write an 80 minute play about themes arising from the history of the Leinster Regiment based in Birr from 1830 until 1922.

As part of this exciting process a series of free workshops took place in October and November whereby interested thespians and scriptwriters from the midlands worked with Michael and Bairbre on developing the script and play.

We are currently looking for two young men, aged 17 – 18 years old, for the leading roles of the two brothers in the play. If you are interested in taking part in any aspect of the project: acting; directing; writing; costume; set; lighting design; and stage management - we would love to see or hear from you.

Further information please contact, Fiona Breen – 086 8904828, email [linenireland@indigo.ie](mailto:linenireland@indigo.ie)  
Article by Fiona Breen

## Straying Closer to the Truth

On Friday evening of the 27th November an exhibition/event entitled, 'Straying Closer To The Truth', will open at The Franciscan Friary, Multyfarnham, Co Westmeath. It will include contributions

from all the: artists; writers; performers; photographers; and carpenters who have taken part in the Multi-Residency Programme since it began in April of last year.

The residency programme has provided a rather unique experience for those who have participated. Even the application process is kind of weird. No Artists' Statements, CV's or Proposals are required. The coordinators simply invite anyone wanting to be involved to send a short email outlining whatever it is that attracted them...and that's it!

Selections are based on the organisers' intuitive attempts to bring together creative individuals with a diverse range of interests, ages, genders and means of expression.

During the residency, participants live with the friars for two weeks. They are provided with free accommodation and food as well as large private studio spaces. They are invited to experience the rhythm of the friars' existence, and can attend morning masses, meditations, meals and any other sundry day-to-day goings-on that might occur.

Also, participants can simply 'be'. There is no expectation or pressure to produce, share or show their work. In a perhaps not so ironic twist, this very open and accepting atmosphere has proven to be conducive to the residents' creativity and inspired many to generate sophisticated, beautiful and challenging things...as you will see if you attend the show.

The residency has received applications from people from all over the world and amongst the twenty-two people who will be involved in 'Straying Closer To The Truth', there are artists from Ireland, England, Eastern Europe and America. The week long extravaganza will include: visual art; performances; poetry readings; and a symposium where members of the public will be invited to join the x-residents and friars in a discussion on the role of art in spirituality...or on spirituality in art... or something else quite fancy.

There will also be an exhibition of children's artwork, depicting young people's representations of 'God'. This work is being produced by young people throughout Ireland as part of a competition being run by the organisers of, 'Straying Closer To The Truth'. If you are interested in entering please visit our website.

The Franciscan Order are currently celebrating their 800th anniversary and intend to display some very rare artefacts and manuscripts throughout the week. At the time of this writing the format of the exhibition/event is evolving...so, that is as much as I can tell you about it for now. As the opening date draws closer, more information will be revealed throughout the local and national press.

For further information visit [www.strayingclosertomulty.com](http://www.strayingclosertomulty.com)



Multyfarnham-Photograph by Lydia Goldblatt

## Hazel Art Gallery

Ballnacarrigy County Westmeath

Michael and Patricia Baynes formally opened Hazel Gallery in Ballnacarrigy village during the Royal Canal Festival in August 2008. The light-filled space of the gallery is an ideal show-place for the wonderful variety of affordable art available in County Westmeath. The opening exhibition entitled, 'Triangle' showcased the works of local artists: Mary Weir; Patricia Baynes; and Mary Evans. They expressed in their work the rich variety of landscape in the local region. The exhibition was well received and indicated a great appreciation for the arts in the local area.

Anna Marie Leavy Boglands Exhibition



This was followed with an exhibition entitled, 'Christmas Miscellany.' Local nature was celebrated in water colour, acrylic, tempera and oils. The seven artists who took part were: Liz Johnson; Mary Weir; Ann Wingfield; Phyl Staunton; Patricia Baynes; Mary Evans; and Dolores Nally.

Robert Crawford joined the catalogue of talent in the Spring of 2009. His energetic and unique style has produced works of great energy and colour. He challenges our perceptions of reality, and leaves the observer full of his own 'joie de vivre'. His subjects include historical figures after the Old Masters. His interest in marine matters has produced a series of exciting Naval Battles from the Napoleonic Era. His exhibition entitled, "Standing Off", opened in June. Anna Marie Leavy and Niall Leavy participated in a successful exhibition of their most recent work during the Royal Canal Festival week in August. Their colourful work reflected the bright palette of summer. The combination of Anna Marie's delicate watercolours and the cheerful colour pallet of her son, Niall produced a visual feast. As a world acclaimed watercolorist, Anna Marie celebrated her pleasure in nature's shapes and images. Boglands and the flora reflected in them is a theme of her recent work in exuberant acrylic colour. Her acute observation and research has won her a devoted following, earning her a place in many private and public collections.

Artists work alone creating their image of the world. They express for their community many unspoken dreams. Their work can crystallise for others, emotions and sentiments which others may find hard to express. We should value that which is created locally and support the unique work of these individuals.

Hazel Gallery Ballnacarrigy is situated on a crossroads. This gives access to all from Longford and Westmeath, who are interested in the Arts. The location of Hazel Gallery may have a philosophical bearing on the dilemma of the Arts in the present economic climate. Any work of art can be considered a luxury in straitened times - until one considers the world without an outlet for all that is fine in any community.

Hazel Gallery provides a platform for local artists. They are happy to receive new works of a high standard from arts graduates and self-taught artists. They hope to present works which make excellent and affordable gifts for all occasions.

Hazel Gallery, 3, Kilmurray Corner, Ballnacarrigy, Co. Westmeath is open every Saturday from 2 to 4 p.m. and can be contacted at 0872863259 and at [hazलगallery@eircom.net](http://hazलगallery@eircom.net)

## DUBLIN FRINGE THEATRE

# DIARY OF BABY PLAYWRIGHT

## Manchán Magan

15th May 2009

I am awoken at 5am in Tucson, Arizona by the bing of an email announcing that I've been accepted to put on a production for the Dublin Fringe Theatre Festival. This must be some mistake. I don't have a production, nor anything like it - just the vaguest kernel of an idea that I suggested to the festival might be worth considering for future years. Either the idea is pure genius, or the fact that it's designed to be bilingual meant it somehow fitted some inclusion quota - either way, I am now a theatre producer.

16th May

I didn't dare respond to the email yesterday, just looked at it, considering its implications - I would have to find a director, a costume person, a rehearsal space, and all the other million things that must be required to put on a piece of theatre - primarily money, I presume, lots of it. After a feverish dream in which Fintan O'Toole's forehead and face emerged from the theatre with a triumphant smile, I decided this morning to accept the challenge. Life doesn't often offer you the opportunity of writing, producing and performing in your first ever theatrical production at the age of 39 - such things need to be grasped tighter than a bunch of nettles.

19th May

The fact that I have absolutely no experience of theatre is still making sleep difficult. My idea is for a short play about an Irish lesson that goes badly wrong, in which the teacher reveals too much through the words he teaches. I'll play the teacher, but I need some young actor for the student. My ideal choice is just starting her Leaving Cert and I don't want to distract her, but I decided a quick text couldn't hurt. 'Will u act in my fringe play?' I texted from the sanctuary of my adobe house downtown which valiantly battles against the 38°C desert heat. I heard nothing for eight hours, then, 'Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah! Oh god yeah!'

20th May

A friend advises me that to have any chance of pulling this off I will need a genius director, so in a fit of panic I send out begging letters for advice to anyone I even vaguely know in the theatre world - most ignored me, but Gerry Stembridge

and Olwen Fouéré sent wonderfully encouraging replies. Olwen even went to the trouble of contacting some people on my behalf. (That woman is a true phenomenon - can't we just beatify her right away?)

21st May

This morning the 5am inbox bing informs me of my venue and dates: Film Base, Temple Bar, 7pm 14th Sept-19th Sept. Is this good or bad? I don't know, but to have any chance of not bankrupting myself entirely I need a sell-out show. The Fringe will pay for the venue and I need to pay for EVERYTHING else. I haven't even begun to think about working out the costs.

26th May

I fly to Dublin and head straight to meet Róise Goan, the ABSOLUT FRINGE director and her team. She doesn't seem at all put out by my lack of experience; in fact she's enthusiastic.. She sits me down and takes me through what I need to know - everything I had been doing my best to ignore until now. It was a whirlwind half-hour of facts and figures - the hourly rate of lighting designers, the cost of public liability insurance, how to negotiate with a production manager, how to run a marketing campaign, how to estimate ticket yield, etc, etc. Gulp!

26th June

Fast-forward through a month of panic and sleepless night until somehow I manage to get the associate director of Rough Magic to direct my show. He brings a set & costume designer, and lighting designer who'll work for practically no money. We being an intense 5 weeks of script editing, trying to hone the story.

7th Aug

My co-actor, Eva O'Connor returns from inter-railing, and rehearsals begin, frightening, but also a lot of fun. The play begins to take shape.

6th Sept

Our first chance to perform a rough version of the play at Electric Picnic, a great opportunity to iron out last minute problems, before the first official preview in Dublin on 14th Sept.



14th-19th Sept 2009

The show goes public and takes on a life of its own. Full houses every night, great reviews and two award nominations. Who could ever have guessed things could have worked so well? The play will be restaged in the Project Arts Centre in 2010 and then will probably tour.

**Broken Croi - Heart Briste** by **Manchán Magan** is an attempt at using Irish in theatre without alienating those who don't speak it - a technical experiment into whether a play can be 50% in one language, but understandable in another. The story revolves around Manchán Magan who plays a disillusioned Gaeilge fanatic seeking revenge for the death of the language on his star pupil, a lonely 18 year old dancer. He offers the audience an opportunity to redeem the situation by answering some simple questions. It is an intimate piece of bilingual theatre directed by Tom Creed and understandable even to Béarlóirí. An Irish lesson goes badly wrong and too much is revealed. Is it in Irish? Can language be a weapon? Who the feic knows?

The idea for it came while doing No Béarla, (a TV series based on a journey around Ireland seeing could I survive speaking only Irish), and learning that Ireland's national theatre, the Abbey, founded to foster Irish culture staged only 4 plays in Irish in a decade, as opposed to 75 in English. This, of course, is because there aren't the audiences for large-scale Irish language productions, but I was keen to explore whether audiences would be interested in a play which presented them with simple straightforward Irish that they would most likely remember from school.

More info: [www.manchan.com](http://www.manchan.com)

# All Ireland One Act Festival

Backstage Theatre Group has been granted the honour of hosting the All Ireland One Act Drama Finals in Backstage Theatre, from December 4th to December 7th 2009. The finals are held under the auspices of the Drama League of Ireland and the Amateur Drama Council of Ireland. This is the second occasion the Backstage Theatre Group has hosted this prestigious event. It's hosting of the finals in 1998 was such a success that any subsequent hosting of the All Ireland Festival has been benchmarked against this standard. The festival is one of the premier events in the Amateur Drama calendar and will showcase and highlight the very best talent of the Amateur Drama Movement both regionally and nationally. Twelve theatre groups will compete for the coveted All Ireland titles.

The official opening of the Finals will be performed by renowned playwright and Director, Gerry Stembridge.

The festival will be adjudicated by Padraic McIntyre. Padraic is Artistic Director of Livin' Dred Theatre Company based in the Ramor Theatre in Virginia. He has directed their first seven productions including: 'Conversations on a Homecoming'; 'The Beauty Queen of Leenane'; 'Belfry' (both of which were nominated for Irish Times Theatre Awards). Padraic also directed a sell-out tour of Pat McCabe's play, 'The Dead School', last year which was nominated in three categories for the 2008 Irish Times Theatre Awards.

### BACKSTAGE THEATRE GROUP

Backstage Theatre Group (BTG) has provided over 60 productions across all theatrical disciplines. Additionally the group has hosted one act festivals and participated in one act, three act, and international festivals. BTG has also been involved in co-productions with professional companies such as: Blue Raincoats; and Gallowglass. BTG has actively pursued a policy of youth drama, and in this regard Backstage Youth was established in 1996. A number of productions that have been staged by Backstage have been written by writers-in-residence from within the group.

One particular highlight was the production of a one-act play, 'A Mother's Love's A Blessing', exclusively written for the group by the internationally acclaimed author of 'The Butcher Boy,' and 'Dead School', - Pat McCabe.

### BACKSTAGE THEATRE - BRINGING THE ARTS TO THE PEOPLE AND THE PEOPLE TO THE ARTS

Opened in April 1995 this purpose-built state of the art theatre was from the outset, a community-driven project.

Its mission is to promote the development of the arts regionally by presenting a high quality, diverse and innovative programme of arts activities which is valued by and engages the community and which provides a platform and resource for artists and companies to present their work. Over the years a growing audience at Backstage has been treated to a dynamic programme of exciting and inspiring theatre. Backstage Theatre has been generously supported by The Arts Council from the outset, and is also funded by Longford County Council.

### DEDICATED WEBSITE

A dedicated website has been created which contains all the information you may wish to know in relation to: The All Ireland One Act Drama Finals; Backstage Theatre Group; Backstage Theatre; and all information relevant to accommodation, catering, etc in Longford. The website address is : [www.oneactslongford.com](http://www.oneactslongford.com)

## ANN EGAN is New Writer-in-Residence in Laois



The Arts Office, Laois County Council is delighted to announce Ann Egan as the new Writer-in-Residence. Ann began her residency on Tuesday, 3rd November for seven weeks.

*"We are delighted that Ann is taking up this residency. She has worked with us in the Arts Office on a number of projects in the last number of years and it is an honour to have her spend time with us*

*in Laois; sharing her skills and talents with aspiring writers and building up a new audience for poetry and writing",* said Arts Officer, Muireann Ni Chonail.

### The literary programme will include:

A 4 week-long creative writing course for children and young people. The course will take place in Áras an Chontae on Tuesdays beginning on the 10th November. The workshops will run for an hour and a half in the afternoon and cost €20 for the course.

A 4 week-long creative writing course for adults will run on Tuesday evenings also beginning on 10th November. Adult workshops will run for 2 hours in the evening and cost €40 for the course.

The children and adult workshops places must be reserved in advance by contacting the Arts Office tel: 057 8674342/41. During her time in Laois, Ann will also conduct readings in local libraries and she will be joined by guest writers. Ann hopes to visit schools, the libraries and hospitals for older people as well as giving time to local writers to assist them with their work. To conclude the residency an evening of celebration will take place in Áras an Chontae on 15th December.

Ann Egan is a multi-award winning poet from County Laois. Awarded a County Laois University Scholarship, she has an M.A. in History and a B.A. in Languages.

Her awards include: The American Ireland Fund; The Annaghmakerrig Prize; Writers' Week Listowel Poetry Prizes; RTE Radio 75 Years; Offaly Millennium Poet; The Oki Prize and many more. Her books are: Landing the Sea (Bradshaw Books); The Wren Women (The Black Mountain Press); Brigit of Kildare (Kildare Library and Arts Services). She has held several writing residencies; edited twelve books; edited The Midlands Arts and Culture Magazine, and co-edited The Great Book of Maynooth. The Wren Women was dramatised by Writers' Week Listowel. Her work has been broadcast on RTE Radio 1 and on local radio stations. She is widely published at home and abroad.

**Those interested in taking part in any of the programme, please contact the Arts Office on 057 8674342/41. If you have any ideas, events or projects that may be of interest to the writer-in-residence during her visit to Laois, please contact her on 057 8674341 from Tuesday 3rd November.**

### April Promise by Margaret Nohilly

## Longford Poet's First Collection Published by Lapwing Press

If the title of this article gives you a cheerful feeling, that makes two of us, because 'April Promise' is the title of my first collection of poems, published by Lapwing, Belfast, and launched on Friday 16th October in our local Library in Lanesboro, Co. Longford.

The whole experience of having a collection of poems published has been exhilarating and deeply affirming. It is something I never dreamed of for me! I wouldn't have considered myself to be especially literary growing up, but was familiar with the poetry of my mother's stepbrother - Michael Walsh of Fore; and I remember being particular about accuracy in use of words.

However, when I became involved in setting up a writers' group in Lanesboro in 1995, I felt as if I had been given 'permission to write' and poetry flowed! I attended many poetry workshops, and learned much about technique and style.

A word of encouragement from Paul Perry, writer-in-residence in 2001/2002, under the auspices of Longford Arts Officer, Fergus Kennedy, set me on the trail of Lapwing Publications, Belfast. With the positive, affirmative response of Dennis Greig of Lapwing (a couple of years later!) - it began to dawn on me that publication was a possibility.

Now it was my turn to drag my feet! Being busy with work as a Primary School Teacher, and the initial euphoria having worn off, I let it slide for several years. On my retirement in 2008 I did a Pushkin Writing Course, in Annaghmakerrig, with skilled writer tutors - notably for me, Eileen Sheehan, Killarney poet.

From then on, I took to writing every day, and the journey to publication was accelerated.

Fortunately, Dennis, at Lapwing was still willing to nurture me along, with incredible patience! A delightful email relationship grew between us, and things progressed steadily, interspersed with my kitchen refurbishment and thyroid surgery!

The climax for me was when about 90 people - neighbours, colleagues, friends and family - gathered to celebrate the launch of my poetry collection - 'April Promise' by Jack Harte, a Lanesboro native, acclaimed novelist and short story writer.

Hearing Jack praise the quality of my work in glowing terms amazed me. When a stream of friends and neighbours came to have their copy signed, I was set for a second consecutive sleepless night - this time from elation!

# Saints and Scholars A landmark for Offaly

In October 2009, An Taoiseach, Mr Brian Cowen, T.D. opened the eagerly awaited N52 Tullamore by-pass. Standing at the northern end of the new by pass, are four prominent 25 foot steel figurines created by artist, Maurice Harron.

Each figurine holds a symbol of the world of learning and sanctity that are representative of the monastic settlements of Durrow and Clonmacnoise. One holds a book, one holds a chalice, one a staff and one throws aloft a flock of birds or souls.

This per cent for art scheme was undertaken and part-funded by Offaly County Council. It was important from the beginning that the public was involved in choosing their landmark, therefore short listed proposals for the scheme were placed on show for the public's comment. Half of those who commented, chose the proposal by Maurice Harron.

In a brief interview, Maurice Harron outlined where his inspiration for the proposal came from: 'The location of the site was very dramatic. It had four hills and also with its proximity to the ancient place of learning of Clonmacnoise, I wished to honour that place. The semi-abstract designs on the



Saints and Scholars by  
Maurice Harron  
Photo by Clare Dunne

sculptures are inspired by the design patterns of the ancient manuscripts like the Book of Durrow'.

When asked how he hoped the public would perceive his work Maurice stated: 'I hope people like it. I hope they think it enhances the environment and becomes a landmark and an emblem of the locality which brings back awareness of their great heritage.'

Maurice went on to describe the processes and new technology used in creating the steel sculptures: 'They were constructed in the city of Derry. We hired a large building with overhead lifting gear. I had two assistants - Kieran Moore and Neill Gormley. We used computer controlled design for the patterns and a laser cutter through the company Inishowen Engineering, we also used tig welding and air plasma cutters'.

Maurice Harron was born in Derry, Northern Ireland and studied at Ulster College of Art & Design. His artistic career has been extensive and his works are showcased in public locations throughout Europe. Many of his sculptures reflect the cultural, social and historical identities of the place where they stand. The four sculptures on the N52 By-Pass are particularly representative of this.

Maurice's last statement was that: 'Although the subject is historical, the work is modern. The stainless steel was chosen to reflect this and react with the rays of the sun at different times during the day'.

Article by Clare Dunne



Saints and Scholars by  
Maurice Harron  
Photo by Clare Dunne

# Emerging Longford Writers

Rose Moran

When she was in fourth year in school the English teacher came in one day with a glossy atlas-size magazine in which there were details of an essay competition with the title 'What I would Like to do When I Leave School.'

She asked some of the pupils to write about it. Since her oldest sister had just got married, Rose waxed eloquently about hoping to marry a millionaire and weeks later she was told she got the first prize. The millionaire didn't appear on the horizon, she says, but she grew in confidence somehow with regard to the written word.

When training for primary teaching the English professor suggested to the trainees to write at least one sentence every day and perhaps a paragraph on some days and to hand her the notebook at the end of term, if they wished, and she would write a comment. Rose was very chuffed when the comment in her notebook commended her descriptive prose pieces about nature and said in fact they were 'quite poetic' at times.

Before long a poetic piece in the style of the day bubbles up inside her and she committed it to the notebook. The notebook had then become a private journal. Occasionally she would put some thought or feeling of hers or an account of some event of special impact into words, sometimes in verse. Looking back now she says this is probably how it all started but of course there were other influences.

The two old women who lived up the field from their home and where Rose and her younger brother visited every evening after school and told stories and read *Curly Wee* with were probably an earlier influence as were many other well remembered characters from her childhood. These characters appear in her writing as well as nature for which she has a great regard. She always encouraged her pupils in primary school to write their own poems.

When a Writers' Group was formed in Longford Library Rose became very enthusiastic and interested and

subsequently joined. Before that she had sent very occasional pieces to different publications and had them published, one in Irish, she recalls, in the Donegal-published paper called 'Amárach', a poem titled: 'Ag Dul Thar Bhráid Dom.' In the Writers' Group participants were encouraged to read their work aloud and this was the first time Rose had read any of her work to anyone apart from her older sisters who loved to listen to and read and write poetry.

The Writers' Group members put their poems together and published a number of magazines of their work locally on different occasions but it was only when Paul Perry was appointed as Writer-in-Residence that they were encouraged to review their writing and get one-to-one feedback from Paul on poems submitted to him.

The publication, edited by Paul: a project supported by the County Arts Officer and County Librarian was called: 'Heartland Writing from Longford'. The book contained a DVD of the writers reading their work. This was a novel idea and feature at the time.

Following this Rose sent her work more widely and had poems on line with Pathade Publishing; Edgeworth Papers; best poem from Longford and inclusion in their journal at The Cúirt International Festival, Galway. Her work was highly commended in *Riposte* and in *Clogh*. Other works appeared in: *Riposte*; *Books Ireland*; *Galway Advertiser*; *Moylurg Writers*; *Abbey Echoes*; *Africa Magazine*; *The Annual Abbeyshrule/Carrickdesmond Newsletter*; and also reflective pieces for religious rituals; Workshops with Noel Monahan helped Rose's writing. Recently published – *Windows/Authors and Artists* – edited by Noel, and Heather Brett also has her work. Her work was chosen for this recent publication, and read at the launch in Longford Library on National Poetry Day, October 1st last.

Many people have encouraged Rose to continue with her style of writing which ranges from couplets to 6 line stanzas, Haiku and the occasional sonnet.

## FULL MOON

I celebrate  
Your coming  
Into fullness

No jagged edges  
You hold  
My desire for wholeness

You encourage rest  
In the shadow side  
To begin again

The slow journey  
Revealing  
A little at a time

Your circumference  
Holds its boundary  
In the vast ocean sky

Light  
Of the night time  
I welcome you

Rose Moran

## THE HALF-QUARTER

Paddy visited in best suit Sundays  
Turf-cutting days in working clothes  
Collected tools for the bog  
Carries water from spring well  
Left a message for the half-quarter

Called way home to tend pipe  
Ritual with penknife tobacco story  
Shredded the nicotine  
Massaged it between palms  
Filled meerschaum

From finger-tapping the top  
He paused to light the paper twist  
As he drew on flame through shank  
Smoke currents filtered  
Through holes in silver topping

During his Christmas visit  
She watched him again transform  
Froth fringed his moustache  
Like snow on thatch as he drank  
Ash tinselled his beard.

Rose Moran

# CHILD AS ARTIST AS CHILD

Martin Kelleher

Difficult though it may appear a thing to do, I have been able to detach my present self from the child I was. It may be the artistic curiosity, an instinct to dig about in the roots, to ask myself, 'Why I cannot do but write?'

By using a colder and less sentimental version of memory I watch and attempt to analyse the simple creature. Simple, for not yet formed about him are those layers: discoveries; radical events; hurts; the unconscious gaining of tricks; the shedding of both ignorance and innocence - all of which elements, when fused, construct the adult armour.

My initial assumption is that he was an odd little guy. From the age of five he could eat adult portions. He had no food prejudices of any kind. No matter what he ate, and in what amounts, he remained thin and delicate. His asthma was so bad that his mother had to learn physiotherapy in order to treat him, and he lay with sanguine indifference on the living room floor while she pummelled his back and chest as though his birdy shell were a leathery sack of horsehair.

He ingested all the rotten medicine, the bitter tonics, without objection. The growing rational part of him took over and rather welcomed it. After all, he wanted to get better. He wasn't going to be the exception, the one with excuses. He wanted to play football just like the other kids and he wanted to win. Nothing odd in that, one supposes. But he read ferociously, hungrily. By the time he was ten or eleven he had grown bored of the children's books and moved on to his parents' and his aunts' collections, then writing stories perhaps to create an infinity of his own. My final conclusion, in contrast to the initial assumption: he was a normal kid.

It's normal for a kid to be odd. One's early form, that relatively unblemished personality, the pre-programmed version, that's your artist right there. He, without fear or self-consciousness, one who sees visions and chases about after them without any care of being thought crazy. The unsophisticated, unrefined soul, the little girl who skips

along in the street at age nine but cannot do so at age twelve because the nature of her fears has switched.

Adults who write or paint or sculpt, or who see the beautiful, the bizarre, through the lens of a camera, are freaks of course. Perhaps they are freaks in somewhat the same way that children are freaks, that they enjoy a particular freedom, a being unafraid. To be seen as a freak comes at least as a secondary consideration because one writes or paints or sculpts as a natural or instinctive reaction to the surprise of seeing the primary vision of life, and not just its flowery side, not just its romance, but just as much its horror, its loneliness.

Most artists could tell you a few things about that last one. To those who admit to not being creative – admit and even mournfully so, for they appreciate good literature and film and other

challenging media – with all the best intentions in the world they misidentify creativity as a wonderful Aladdin's Cave when really, more often, it is a coalmine. The diamonds are there. Maybe. You are weighed down with the faith that they are there. Sometimes they are not. Sometimes you have to stay longer than you ought to. And maybe, and only sometimes, you will find them.

While I do not volunteer it unless asked, there are two main reactions when a person is told that I write. The first is that they will tell me it is something they've always wanted to do. The second is that they'll make the correct connection and say that they used to draw a lot, they were good at art when they were kids. In both cases there is a sense of regret. It makes me wonder at the common feeling of losing childhood, that the loss of childhood is the great scar which unites all people, however inevitable and necessary it is. Inevitable and necessary for all but the artist.

Martin Kelleher has been writing and publishing short stories since 1987. He is the author of *Small City Blues* Numbers 1 to 57, an homage to his native Cork City. He lives in Athlone.

## Arthouse@Stradbally

### THE COURT HOUSE STRADBALLY COUNTY LAOIS

The Arts Laois County Council is delighted to announce that work will commence shortly on the Arthouse@Stradbally, The Court House, Co Laois. It is hoped that work will be completed by the end of 2010.

This project envisages the refurbishment and extension of Stradbally Court House to provide: artists' studios; exhibition space; educational facilities and living accommodation for artists in residence and for non-residential artists' spaces. This development represents a unique opportunity to secure the future of an acknowledged high quality heritage building by the establishment of an Arts Facility to complement the existing library.

The artists' studios (residential and non-residential) will attract local, national, international artists to the area. Other services proposed are: a recording and rehearsal space; a kiln; a coffee area and gallery space that will further enhance the community use of the facilities.

For more information on the development contact: The Arts Office, Laois County Council Tel: 057 8674342/44 or email [artsoff@laoiscoco.ie](mailto:artsoff@laoiscoco.ie) or visit the website [www.laoiscoco.ie](http://www.laoiscoco.ie)

## Tullamore Community Arts Centre

Tullamore is a vibrant town, as well as being the capital of Offaly. In recent years the town has benefitted from having a newly refurbished town park, a state of the art indoor swimming and leisure complex, in addition to upgraded GAA and soccer stadiums. It is also renowned for being the entertainment hub of the Midlands with its many pubs, restaurants and nightclubs.

However, there has been something missing from the landscape of the town - an Arts Centre where the people of Tullamore could enjoy plays, shows and exhibitions in purpose built, comfortable surroundings.

For some ten years or so a few die-hards carried the torch for establishing a Community Arts Centre in Tullamore. They lobbied politicians and council officials trying to convince them of the need for such a facility in a town that had virtually everything.

In early 2009 an open meeting was held in Tullamore that was attended by over 200 interested citizens. It was quite obvious from the atmosphere of the meeting that there was a demand for a Community Arts Centre in Tullamore, and to this end a committee was established to further the objective. That committee drew up proposals for a centre and met on a number of occasions with councillors and officials.

The up-shot has been that a Tullamore Community Arts Centre Project Team, comprising senior County Council executives, councillors, arts enthusiasts and business people, has been established to further the project. The Team has already visited some 12 Arts Centres around the country, has agreed on the facilities that should be accommodated in a Tullamore centre, and is now examining the capital costs together with the running expenses of such a facility. The Team will then move on to examining various town centre locations for a Community Arts Centre.

At long last it seems that the dream of having a Community Arts Centre in Tullamore could become a reality.

Article by Desmond Doyle



## Birr Theatre & Arts Centre Dancing to Christmas

Birr Theatre and Arts Centre is a high quality facility which hosts a wide range of events and shows throughout the year. Over the next couple of months a number of dance performances will take place, showcasing the diversity of talent locally, nationally and internationally.

A first for Birr- Nemian Danza, direct from Mexico City in association with Legitimate Bodies Dance Company, on Thursday 26th November will present an exhilarating programme of top quality dance performance which promises to be a spectacular evening.

The fairytale ballet, "Nutcracker" portrays the story of Clara, Drosselmeyer and, of course, that Christmas gift, the Nutcracker on Saturday 12th December. This will be a culmination of the hard work throughout the autumn semester of Offaly Youth Dance, First Footing, Yummy Dance as well as a few grown-ups!

DARI (Dance Artists in Regional Ireland) on Thursday 17th December, is a scheme instigated by dance artists: Nick Bryson; Cristina Goletti; Tanya McCrory; and Cathrine Young. It allows professional dancers based outside Dublin to access professional training and choreographic mentorship. To reserve a place: legitimatebodies@gmail.com.

Full details on all events can be found on: [www.birtheatre.com](http://www.birtheatre.com) or from the box office: (057) 9122911 Mon-Fri 1-5.30pm. Purchases can also be made online - all tickets must be paid for at time of booking (credit cards accepted) tickets non-refundable.

Don't miss a date - join our mail list - Today! [birrtheatre@eircom.net](mailto:birrtheatre@eircom.net)

## Clara Musical Presents Disney's Beauty and the Beast

Clara Musical Society will present Disney's Beauty & The Beast from Tuesday 23rd to Saturday 27th of March 2010 in the GAA Centre, Clara, Co Offaly.

Disney's first foray into theatrical production became Broadway's sixth longest running show of all time. Beauty and the Beast is a worldwide stage success which launched Disney's theatrical division and led to the recreation of other beloved Disney films on stage.

Disney's Beauty and the Beast is the musical stage adaptation of the company's hit animated feature from 1991, featuring: Alan Menken's Academy Award-winning score; songs by the late Howard Ashman and Alan Menken (including the Academy Award-winning title song and the show-stopping 'Be Our Guest'); plus songs written especially for the stage by Alan Menken and Tim Rice (including 'If I Can't Love Her' and 'A Change In Me'). The book is by Linda Woolverton, author of the original screenplay.

Beauty and the Beast brings us the fabled Disney magic, charm and enchantment for the whole family. Don't miss your chance to see it in Clara in March 2010.

For further information please call 087 9366247, visit our website [www.clarams.com](http://www.clarams.com) or email [info@clarams.com](mailto:info@clarams.com)

## Dunamaise Arts Centre December 2009 & January 2010

The Dunamaise Arts Centre, Portlaoise will have a very exciting programme of events over the coming months including a children's theatre show The Magic Christmas Tree from 14th - 16th December; a Christmas concert with The American Drifters on Saturday, December 19th.



Porthole' by Cora Cummins

The New Year will see the arts centre welcoming the return of the much loved Jack L on January 16th 2010 and Portlaoise Pantomime Group will present their 26th annual production with Dick Whittington & His Cat from 23rd to 30th January.

In the gallery within the arts centre, Cora Cummins will present Retreat, an exhibition of new print-works, drawings and paper sculpture throughout December and an exhibition of paintings and drawings by Maria O'Brien will take place throughout January and February.

The arts centre's spring programme of events will be announced in early January. Log onto [www.dunamaise.ie](http://www.dunamaise.ie) for more details.

Tickets for all shows are available from the box Office Tel: 057 8663355 or online at [www.dunamaise.ie](http://www.dunamaise.ie)

## Simon Delaney Directs Tullamore Musical Societies' FIDDLER ON THE ROOF

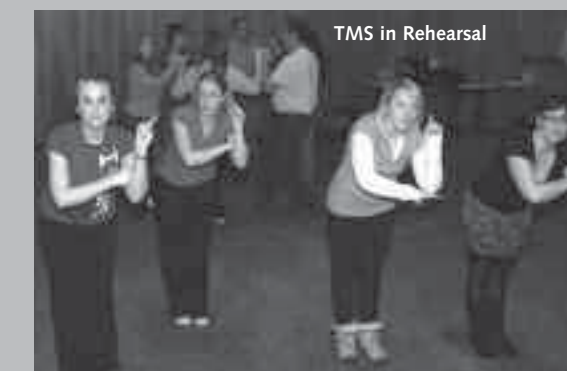
Tullamore Musical Society, in association with AIMS is proud to present **Fiddler on the Roof**. Running from Monday 18th - Friday 22nd January 2010 inclusive, with a Gala performance for Patrons & Sponsors on Saturday 23rd, this unforgettable and legendary show incorporates witty humour and impressive drama. With an award winning production team and a highly talented cast, this is not a show to be missed.

Previously staged by TMS in 1993, this production of Fiddler will take a new lease of life under the direction of wellknown Irish comedic actor, Simon Delaney. TMS also welcomes back the

highly talented choreographer, Tara Ann Byrne and remarkably artistic, Enda O' Connor as Music Director.

Fiddler is the eventful imaginative and funny musical based on the life of a poor heartwarming milkman, Tevye. His tales are entwined in one of the most wellknown and favourite scores of all time including such songs as "If I Were A Rich Man", "Match-maker", "Tradition" and "Sunrise, Sunset". The story introduces his family and the village of Anatevka in Czarist Russia in 1905 where faith and love inspire a generation. His daughters, like most young ladies, are caught up with the idea of finding their perfect match, all

with the aid of Yente, the village matchmaker. As for most fathers, Tevye is reluctant to trust his daughter's choice of men. All of which spirals into an extremely entertaining show.



TMS in Rehearsal

# Transitions

## A NEW EXHIBITION AT MARKET GALLERY MULLINGAR

Teresa Doyle and Ursula Meehan share the space of The Market House Gallery Mullingar for their joint show - 'Transitions', opening Sunday 8th - 26th November 2009

Following a two year engagement with An Post C Both Sides - an art project with an energetic engagement with the public - Teresa Doyle's recent work has taken her "home", grounded in the basics and simplicity of daily tasks.

Alluding to a summer of physical work on the bog, and abundant chores that are a daily occurrence, Teresa examines the honed knowledge of tasks well practiced through repeated action, and the ritual and reverence attached to them. In her work, Doyle looks closely at form, colour and movement while representing - as if seeing for the first time - all that is so ordinary around her.

Influenced by the drawings of Giacometti and Jack Donovan's collages, Teresa, with economic use of pencil and collage, works from life and memory to tell of whom and of what she encounters in her daily engagements.

Ursula Meehan's new work invites people to connect to her paintings on an abstract level. Denying representational images, the paintings linger in a half-world where forms almost happen, and it is for the onlooker to see what they see. Ursula has evolved her painting technique through deliberate explorations in mark making and use of everyday implements as painting tools.

Influenced by the natural textures of her North Westmeath environment, from hill to quarry, reflective puddles to weather-worn buildings, she creates layers and transparencies which resonate with subtle depths and hues to be revealed on the periphery of the mind.

The Market House Gallery opens 11am - 5pm Tuesday to Friday, 10am - 6pm Saturday

# Transitions

Music Network is delighted to announce a major philanthropic gift to be invested in music education in Ireland. €5 million has been donated by U2 and a further €2 million pledged by The Ireland Funds to allow a national system of music education provision to be rolled out between 2010 and 2015.

With funding from the Arts Council, Music Network has over the last number of years been working to raise awareness of the value of music education, and of the need for enhanced provision through a national system of local music education services. A model developed by Music Network (as recommended in the Music Network report - *A National System of Local Music Education Services - Report of a Feasibility Study 2003*)<sup>1</sup> set out to make music education available to all children of the state irrespective of their geographical location and their social and economic circumstances. The model is widely agreed to be a workable and cost efficient solution.

*"This gift allows us to implement a planned, integrated approach to music education at a national level so that the potential and talent of our young people can be developed. The roll-out of our model will make an important contribution to music in Ireland, and to educational provision generally,"* Deirdre McCrea Music Network CEO explains.

The Edge, speaking on behalf of U2, says, *"Being around music at a young age was important for us and we were lucky to have it at school. We had been looking for some time for a way to get involved in an initiative in music education in Ireland. After talking to various people in Ireland about what to do, we came to the conclusion that the Music Network scheme is really well thought out and that we, in partnership with The Ireland Funds, should just get behind it."*

Loretta Brennan Glucksman, Chair of The American Ireland Fund says, *"Our goal is to stimulate philanthropy in Ireland and the scheme falls under two of our funding priorities - education and culture. We are thrilled to be part of a project, which will bring the Music Network Scheme nationwide as it is a proven success and has wide-ranging support from Government as well as the music education establishment. We believe that the programme will make a huge contribution to music education in Ireland."*

# Major Philanthropic Gift for Music Announced



€7 million donated to music education in Ireland  
Music Education Project to Roll Out Nationally



The Minister for Education and Science, Batt O'Keeffe TD, says, *"I'm delighted that U2 and The Ireland Funds have agreed to join us as partners in progressing the music agenda in Ireland. We recognised the gaps in music education in 2001 when a feasibility study was commissioned to examine how a national system of publicly supported local music schools might be provided. The pilot schemes which Government has funded since 2004 will now provide the model to roll the scheme out nationally. We are very grateful for the support of U2 and The Ireland Funds for the programme over the next six years. It has the potential to create a true legacy for music education in Ireland."*

Music Network will administer the scheme, which will be rolled out on a phased basis, in a number of new locations each year, beginning in 2010 and including all musical genres. Involvement in the scheme will be offered on the basis of competitive tender. Local interests (for example one or more local VECs and/or local authorities, local private music schools, parents groups etc) will be invited to bid for a three-year subsidy to provide for the costs of teachers and local administration; they must show how they will generate matching resources locally, and how they will plan to make the scheme sustainable in the longer term. Further details from [www.musicnetwork.ie](http://www.musicnetwork.ie).

# Interview with Declan

BY MUIREANN NÍ CHONAILL, ARTS OFFICER LAOIS COUNTY COUNCIL



## Declan, first may I first ask you how you became Executive Producer of Music in BBC Northern Ireland?

One of my first jobs was with Classic FM, Britain's first national commercial station. I began compiling the music tracks for the station and by the time we went on air, I was producing the evening schedule: concerts, live music and presenter led shows. In 1998 I moved to Belfast to take up the post of Music Producer with BBC Northern Ireland, producing orchestral concerts and speech programmes for BBC Radio 3 (the UK'S classical music and culture station) and BBC Radio Ulster.

I have always been interested in a wide range of music and following a restructure in 2001, when all the music output came under one umbrella, I became Editor of Music. My work today is very varied, overseeing a wide range of programming, from popular music documentaries on Radio 2, classical output on Radio 3, and TV programmes such as the annual Proms in the Park event.

## Where did you receive your musical training?

I completed my piano exams through the Royal Irish Academy of Music and then went on to do a music degree at UCC. I studied piano with Una Hunt at the Cork School of Music. Prof. Mícheál Ó'Súilleabháin was still in UCC when I was there

(prior to his departure for UL) and I particularly remember his lectures on Séan Ó' Riada. I produced a BBC concert with Mícheál and the Ulster Orchestra a few years ago, which was a bit of a reunion! I also worked with the composer Gerald Barry on a new Radio 3 commission for the Ulster Orchestra and he was also one of my lecturers at UCC. Another of my lecturers, Prof. Jeremy Dibble is now based in Durham University and I am currently working with him on the premiere recordings of works by the Dublin born composer Charles Villiers Stanford.

## Was there an influential person in your background who encouraged your creative process?

Yes, my first music teacher, Mary Larkin. I grew up in Rathdowney, Co Laois near the border with Tipperary, and every Monday night my father would drive me along the very bumpy bog road to Templetohy for piano lessons. She was very encouraging and, like all great teachers, enabled you to achieve more than you thought possible. Leaving Certificate music was not available at my local secondary school so she prepared me for the music entrance test at UCC. Without her drive and focus, I don't think I'd have been in a position to do a Music Degree. I think great credit is due to the committed teachers who work tirelessly in rural parts of Ireland, creating

# McGovern

opportunities which would otherwise not exist for young musicians.

From a professional point of view, Michael Bukht, the first programme controller of Classic FM, was the single most important influence on me. He was a fiery, charismatic leader and in between bouts of being petrified by him, I grew very quickly in the job because of the faith he invested in me. He took risks by throwing me in at the deep end, producing all kinds of programmes, from live shows to documentaries, and even trips to Australia and America for live broadcasts! Humphrey Burton, former Head of Music & Arts with the BBC was also a great mentor. He is Leonard Bernstein's biographer and a major career highlight for me was producing 'The Lives of Leonard Bernstein' with Humphrey, which won a New York International Radio Festivals award.

## What other career choices would you be interested in if you were not a radio and TV producer?

I'm interested in the area of concert promotion. There is huge scope for more inventive concert formats and content, especially in creating interesting and unusual musical combinations. I am particularly interested in using orchestras in different ways, exploring creative collisions between contemporary artists and orchestral forces.

## You are a director on the board of Music Network, the development agency for music in Ireland, do you think music in Ireland is in a healthy state?

Yes. This is a music-loving country. Rich in our own indigenous music, curious (perhaps partly because of our island culture) about other musical worlds. BBC Radio Ulster and Lyric FM does a great job in expanding people's listening horizons, and the wide range of venues, music festivals and publications now on offer means that audiences are better served than ever before. However, much more needs to be done, especially in building knowledge and growing audiences for more specialist music. U2 and the Ireland Funds have recently announced major support for Music Network's vision for an all Ireland music education system, available on a county wide basis. There is great scope to make a real difference to music education and awareness through this scheme.

## What advice would you have for someone interested in a career in radio?

It depends on which career. There are many: producer; presenter; reporter; music scheduler; sound engineer etc. So the first piece of advice is to have a clear picture of what you'd like to do. It's a given that you'll be an avid radio listener. It's always useful to complete a practical training course in sound recording and radio skills: how to use sounds to tell a story. Use initiative and be a self-starter. Make a short feature on a subject that interests you. Always put yourself in the position of the listener. If you show initiative, if you're well informed, if you have ideas, if you are familiar with the output of the station you'd like to work for, and if you are a first class communicator, then you're well on your way to pursuing a fulfilling career in radio.

## The 65 Kitchen Choir

*The 65 Kitchen Choir - an intriguing title it is.*

*It's inspiration? The year 1965, perhaps?*

*The number of members? Their age profile?*

*But where does the kitchen come in?*

It actually comes from the kitchen of Number 65, Marian Avenue, Portlaoise. It is in this unlikely setting that this unique choir was formed, or to be more precise, evolved. The musical director and founder of the choir, Caroline Smith, has been teaching guitar in Number 65 for many years, and comes from a wellknown musical family in Portlaoise. Like many similar housing estates across the country, an Annual Mass is held on the green for the residents, affectionately known as 'The Mass on the grass'.

Caroline duly organised the music for this annual event, bringing some of her students, family and friends together. Such was its success over the years that they wanted to keep singing beyond the Annual Mass and so was born the 65 Kitchen Choir. The choir is made up of 30 singers and musicians, aged between 18 and 70, many of whom are related.

In 2007 they took the brave step of putting on their first show in the Dunamais Theatre - Jukebox Memories, which featured songs from the 50's right up to the 80's with a mixture of rock, pop and everything in between. It was a resounding success and their enthusiasm for what they do was infectious from the opening song.

The Choir have since performed at the Durrow Arts Festival and this year will present Memories Are Made of This (With a Christmas Twist) in the Dunamais Theatre on Thursday 10th - Saturday 12th December, tickets available from the Box Office (057)8663355.

Music has often played a major part in what's known as community spirit - The 65 Kitchen Choir have certainly fulfilled this role in Marian Avenue, Portlaoise.



# EVOCAATION:

## A review of Eoin Butler's recent work by Tom Halpin

Probably the best known use of the bog in contemporary Irish writing is to be found in the poetry of Seamus Heaney, especially during the 1970s when it first enters his work as part of a complex response to the violence in Northern Ireland. Essentially, 'as the memory of the landscape, or as a landscape that remembered everything that happened in and to it' (Heaney, 1980: p.54), the bog has historical and archeological resonances in Heaney's poems: as he memorably wrote in 'Bogland', one of his best known poems on that aspect of Irish landscape, 'Our pioneers keep striking/Inwards and downwards, /Every layer they strip/Seems camped on before' (ibid. p.55).

In that sense Heaney's Bog Poems are inseparable from the long continuity of human habitation and its associated rituals: the titles of a number of them – 'Tollund Man'; 'The Grauballe Man'; 'Bog Queen' – imply as much.

Eoin Butler's *Bog Series* is by no means devoid of such associations – or evocations. The human presence, and its long and sustaining association with that landscape, is implied in the very titles of a number of the charcoal drawings (*Unfooted Turf*), and of the oils (the *Bog Plot* sequence). But both in these pieces, where the reference to human settlement or activity is unmistakable, if indirect, as well as in those where there is little or no such reference, a human presence is nevertheless implied in even more subtle and oblique ways: in the assumed presence of the viewer; or, perhaps more

accurately, in the kind of viewer who is prepared to respond to the particular demands which this series makes; by giving to both the charcoals and the oils the quality of attention which their distinctive forms and techniques require in order to absorb and complete the circuit of communication they initiate. And this is where the essential difference (quite apart from those which arise in comparing any visual with a verbal medium) between Butler's *Bog Series* and Heaney's series of Bog Poems comes into play, between the culturally specific historical and archeological dimensions of the latter, and the increasingly more purely reflective and contemplative demands of the former. And although a piece such as 'Relics' cautions against making too absolute a distinction, nevertheless, as the artist himself expresses it with regard to the *Series* as a whole, 'The work is not descriptive, but conceptual.'

The charcoals are compositions which highlight in the main the relationship of place to space in the spare, economic use of the charcoal medium, whether the notation of an aspect of landscape is laconic, almost minimalist (as in the first of the two *Les Rousses* drawings and in *Under Night Sky*), or more particularised (as in *Source* and the *Bog Study* pieces). Either way, however, and no matter how exact their notations are, they almost invariably create the impression of the physical details in the process of emerging from their spatial surround, as if attempting to float free, or, alternatively, perhaps receding back into the white void from which they have only just been released.

In the oil paintings, and particularly in those where the canvas is divided horizontally between blocks or planes of contrasting or complimenting colour – evocative of bog and sky respectively – there is a Rothkoesque quality to the perceptible layering of colour tones and the frequently shimmering dissolve of one plane into the other: whether the colouring of the lower plane is darker and more subdued (*Black Sod; Before My Father's Father ; The Seventh Day*) or lighter, brighter (as in *Yellow Green Bog; and Yellow Bog*). These are works which draw one in, which require a slowing down and a concentration in one's mechanism of response, as if they were functioning by analogy with the religious iconography of the Eastern Orthodox traditions as a focus of spiritual meditation, of purely inner exploration.

# BOG SERIES

What none of the above observations do justice to, however, is the range of styles employed in the charcoals, from the atmospheric *Changing Light – Les Rousses* to the more nearly abstract *Under Night Sky*; and the extraordinarily full use of the palette in the oils, from the startlingly vivid juxtaposition of the blocks and bars of colour in *Bog Pool*, through the simpler arrangements of blues, greys and whites of *Vigil* and *Before Buttercups and Cowslips Open*, to the more sombre impact of *Hallowed Ground* (1 and 2) and *Changeable*.

Reference: Seamus Heaney, *Preoccupations: Selected Prose 1968-1978* (Faber and Faber: London, London, 1980).

Eoin Butler is a native of Mullingar and currently lives in Dun Laoghaire, Co. Dublin. He retired in 2005 as Senior Lecturer

and Head of the Visual Arts Department, St. Patrick's College of Education, Dublin. In 1968 he established the Dun Laoghaire School of Art.

Throughout his career he received numerous awards, including winner of the Commemorative International Labour organisation (the podium shared with James Coleman, special merit for his video). While attending the National College of Art and Design, he was awarded 3 major scholarships to study painting there, and also awarded a Helsinki Fellowship in the '60s.

He has undertaken many painting commissions, along with stained glass projects, including extensive artwork for St. Paul's Church in his native Mullingar.

## DESIGNHUB EXHIBITION 2009

Four enthusiastic designers, three of whom are students from the midlands, endeavor to create work for themselves and others in the midlands with their venture - Designhub. Jennifer Dillon, Angela Mahon, Dmitry Sheremetiev and Noel Joyce make up the group behind the idea. This November in conjunction with the Offaly Enterprise Board, they organised a design exhibition which they hope will be an annual event.



Ergostop designed by Noel Joyce  
Winner of the Dyson awards 2009.

bridge between the problem-solving activities of design and the production and manufacturing capabilities of local industry.'

'By providing a one stop shop for businesses, Designhub can provide a more efficient way for those businesses to acquire design services whether it be logo design, or for someone who has a new invention which requires product design, we seek to be able to provide the means to get a new idea or product from point A to point Z'. states Jennifer Dillon.

The Business of Design Seminar and Exhibition was held in the Tullamore

Court Hotel, Tullamore Co. Offaly on the 3rd and 4th of November 2009. The Offaly County Enterprise board invited speakers: Michael Burke of Stira; Sean Mc Nulty of Innovator; and Michelle O Donnell of Glasshammer Studios to talk about design and innovation in Business.

Exhibitors included midlands designers from a range of design disciplines including: architecture; interior; furniture and product design; multimedia and graphic design.

The Designhub members were on hand with collaborative work as well as individual work on display, which included the 2009 James Dyson award winning project.

Jennifer Dillon stated, 'Designhubs objective for the exhibition was to engage local businesses and companies in design and to show the economical advantages and problem solving capabilities that design can provide for them'.

The Dyson Student Creativity Day also took place on Wednesday the 4th of November which included students from all design colleges throughout Ireland participating in a day of innovation.

# SCULPTURE in the PARKLANDS

## RESIDENCIES



System #30, Julian Wilde



Passage, Alan Counihan

Two startling new sculptures were recently unveiled in Sculpture in the Parklands. Alan Counihan and Julian Wilde, creators of the sculptures were on residencies in Lough Boora, funded by Offaly County Council, The Arts Council and Bord na Móna. Alan Counihan has kindly given us a brief view on his time in Lough Boora.

'All good things come to an end. Julian Wilde and I have just completed three weeks as artists-in-residence at Lough Boora's Sculpture in the Parklands. We have both created our largest works to date. They now join the permanent collection of outdoor sculpture which year by year is growing among the landscape of the cutaway bogs.

Each in its own way, our works were created using the tools and technology which Bord na Móna has employed here for decades. Julian's new work, 'System 30', sited in the waters of a canal and suggestive of a stone skipping across its reflective surface, has a wonderfully energetic and joyful presence. "Passage", my own work, is by contrast more contemplative and comprises a steel-lined trench cut into a turf bank out of which one rises into a tree-lined clearing.

These three weeks have been a most intense and rewarding time. Our works could not have been realised without the vision, enthusiasm and resourcefulness of curator, Kevin O'Dwyer and Tom Egan of Bord na Móna. For the commitment and skills of the men in the Boora workshops, we are deeply grateful. Thanks to this team, and all those who support them, something rare and unique is being created in the Parklands. It is a privilege to be a part of it.'

Alan Counihan. September 2009.

## LAOIS ARTIST Wins Art Award

Lisa Fingleton from Stradbally, County Laois was last week selected as winner of the 'Emerging Artist Award' at the Claremorris Open Exhibition. The Claremorris Open, now in its 32nd year, is one of the most prestigious open exhibitions in Ireland.



L to R Gerard Mannix Flynn, Lisa Fingleton, Jonny Kirrane (Chair of COE), Lawrence Kavanagh, Tom Morton

This year over 200 artists submitted works and 37 were selected by the adjudicator, Tom Morton, Curator at the Hayward Gallery in London. According to Tom, 'The Claremorris Open is a special exhibition, one that people come together to realise for the simple reason that, in doing so, they make the world a richer, stranger, more vivid place to inhabit'.

Of the artists selected, there were only three prizewinners on opening night. According to Lisa, 'I am absolutely delighted to win this award and am very aware of the legacy of contemporary artists who have gone before me'.

Tom Morton described Lisa's work, 'Outside I'm Singing', as 'a brave and moving piece in which the value of human difference is joyfully affirmed'. Lisa worked in collaboration with Mná Mná Choir (Cork) and musical director, Evelyn Quinlan for over a year on the project.

Lisa was previously a winner of the Patronage Award from Laois County Council. Lisa says, 'I am really grateful for all the support I have received from Laois County Council Arts Office over the years. They really encouraged and supported me right from the beginning and that is so important to me'.

The Claremorris Open Exhibition runs in various locations in Claremorris County Mayo until 25th September. The two other prizewinners were Lawrence Kavanagh and David O Kane.

Midlands' Artists Exhibit at Birr Theatre & Arts Centre

## COMMON GROUND 2009

Following the success of last year's visual arts exhibition - Common Ground - Birr Theatre & Arts Centre recently called for submissions from artists living in the Midlands to submit work for a new group show. **Common Ground 2009** refers to a group of artists coming together to exhibit.

This professionally curated exhibition showcases the exceptional talent and diversity of Visual Arts in the Midlands today.

The exhibiting artists are: Tara Barone; Emma Barone; Kieran Brennan; Mary Culleton; Caroline Egan; Niall Fitzpatrick; Francis Gallagher; John Gillen; Kathleen Gormley; Denis Kelly; Rosemarie Langtry; Mary Lynam; Jackie Lynch; Judy Pearson; Sharon Power; Verona Stellet; and Angela Williams.

This exhibition, officially opened on Friday 2nd October will run in the gallery space *Suas an Staighre* at Birr Theatre and Arts Centre until the end of December.

Full details on all events can be found on [www.birrtheatre.com](http://www.birrtheatre.com) or from the box office: (057) 9122911 Mon-Fri 1-5.30pm.



Sharon Power Moon and Me



## THE GALLERY @ Abbeyleix Library

The Gallery @ Abbeyleix Library is proving to be an attractive and successful exhibition space for local and regional artists. The Gallery is located, along with the public library, in the recently restored Market House in Abbeyleix. The provision of a large glass display area in the gallery, which faces onto the main Cork – Dublin road, ensures that the artwork is clearly visible to passing traffic.

The exhibition space consists of approximately 37m<sup>2</sup> of wall space, a large glass display window and an ultra modern lighting system. It boasts a flexible, user-friendly hanging system that consists of a track mounted on the wall, with moveable hangers and adjustable hooks.

Another attraction of the exhibition space is that the venue is being offered free of charge to artists and there is no commission charged on the sale of artwork. 15 exhibitions have been launched at the Gallery, since its official opening in June 2008, and there has been a steady influx of applications for exhibitions in 2010.

Along with: acrylics; watercolours; oil paintings; pastels; limited edition prints; and art glass; the gallery has also exhibited sculptures, ceramics and origami pieces. Approximately 64 pieces of art or sculpture have been sold.

Past exhibitors have included: Caroline Conway; Shauna Blanchfield; Eilish O'Mahony; Noel Hume; Gillian O'Rourke; Stacia Blake to name but a few.

"Beloved, all is well", an exhibition by Astrid Walsh was displayed in the gallery for the month of October. This exhibition was inspired by video footage which was captured in collaboration with Canadian dancer -Shelly Nafshi

"The Beyondness of Things", an exhibition by John Walsh is being displayed throughout the month of November. John lives in Donoughmore, Ballyragget, Co Kilkenny and runs Hillside Art Gallery along with Colette O'Brien.

The gallery is currently booked up until September 2010 and exhibitors scheduled include: Kathleen McManus; Bill Davis; Mary Dunne; and Joseph Kennedy.

The Gallery @ Abbeyleix Library provides local artists with a great opportunity to showcase their work, and locating the gallery in a public library makes art more accessible to the general public.

**For more information contact Laura at 057 8730020.**

# REFLECTIONS

from Belmont Mill and Artist Studios

This year Belmont Mills Studios established links with Art Colleges North and South to encourage recent Art graduates and postgraduates to apply for the Bursary Programme. Tutors at the colleges were delighted with this direct approach and it is firmly believed that the studios can build on this supportive relationship into the future.

Six bursaries were awarded in 2009, four have been undertaken. The final two bursary awardees- Elayne O'Connor, graduate of Crawford College Cork, and Emily Robin Archer, graduate of NCAD are now resident until the end of November 2009. There will be an open studio at Belmont Mills on Friday 13th November from 7-9pm that will allow people to see examples of Elayne and Emily's work.

Both Elayne and Emily, whilst resident at Belmont Mills, will be taking part in a pilot programme organised with Birr Community School. The programme aims to create awareness by talking to and engaging Leaving Certificate students on themes surrounding an artist's life and the possibilities open to those wishing to pursue a life as an artist.

Emily has kindly given us an artistic insight in Belmont - "It's funny how small changes in your life can make you think differently about what you do in the studio. I've been used to moving around: from home to boarding school; to college in Dublin; crummy student house to crummier student house; living in Italy; and to top it off, a set of vagabond parents who moved the entire family to Africa 10 years ago.

Oddly enough, it's taken a comparatively small move down to Belmont to really get me thinking about this constant displacement and the idea of *home*. "Where are you from?" they ask, "And don't you miss Africa?" Sometimes I think people are dissatisfied by my indifferent response. It's not that I don't love Africa or miss my family but this is not the *home* that I long for.

I've always used childhood memory and old photographs as a starting point for my art work; remaking images from that distant part of life is important to me. It's like reconstructing those moments of wonder, innocence and growing up. People have told me that my work is nostalgic, now I think its motivated by a sort of 'delayed homesickness'. Maybe we are all trying to get back to a place called home, an idea that only exists in our memory, a sense of security, sanctuary and confidence. For me at least, home is a memory and memory is an image to be re-created. Which gets me thinking, in spite of all these years, moving from place to place and never feeling quite like you belong anywhere, perhaps *home is*, after all, where the *art is*".



### EMILY ARCHER

Finally it is always good to hear how previous bursary artists are doing outside in the 'harsh world' and if they have had any success. Eoin O'Conaill recently had a successful, solo exhibition, "Common Place" at the Gallery of Photography after winning Artist's Award for 2009, and Laura Fitzgerald won a Percent for Art commission for a national school in Portarlinton. Congratulations to both.

For information with regard to bursaries in 2010 please contact Belmont Mill Studios, Belmont, Fermoy, Co. Offaly or

**e-mail: info@belmontmill.com tel: 09064 57598**

## LEGITIMATE BODIES DANCE COMPANY: Daring to Dream

Legitimate Bodies Dance Company is proving to be one of the most dynamic artistic reality in the country and a great example of strategic forward thinking by a Midlands County Council. In two years the dance company based in Birr Theatre and Arts Centre has established a successful educational and outreach programme of dance and well-being classes for all ages in the community as well as reaching a well-respected position in the national and international dance scene.

Maybe the most impressive quality of this young reality is the courage and drive that inspire the two artistic directors Nick Bryson and Cristina Goletti. Both of them are not afraid constantly to raise their game and investigate contemporary dance and physical theatre.

This curiosity and openness led the Offaly based company to commission Arno Schuitemaker, a rising talented dance maker from Holland to create R-ATED, an intense physically and emotionally challenging duo for a man and a woman that premiered at the Absolut Dublin Fringe Festival 2009. The piece was warmly received by the audience and critics, and will tour Europe and the USA in the spring 2010.

Legitimate Bodies toured nationally this autumn to some of the best venues and festivals in the country with a double bill that features the core of the company works: "Hanging in There" and "Touching Distance". Both pieces are refreshingly relevant and accessible to a wider audience.



Legitimate Bodies Touching Distance

Also, as part of their international exchange programme, Legitimate Bodies is delighted to facilitate the Irish tour of one of the most successful Mexican modern dance company-Nemian. The company, composed of 6 incredible performers, will tour Ireland for a week from the 21st of November to the 27th with performances scheduled in Bray (Mermaid Arts Centre, 21st Nov), Birr (Birr theatre and Arts Centre, 26th Nov), Cork (Firkin Crane, 27th Nov) and Leitrim (Glens Centre, 24th Nov). Keep an eye out for this incredible event!

For more information about the company's outreach work or productions please contact [legitimatebodies@gmail.com](mailto:legitimatebodies@gmail.com)

### Slieve Bloom Photography Club

**The Slieve Bloom Photography Club was launched in Tullamore in July 2009 by a small group of likeminded photo enthusiasts who had met during a photo course. At its launch the club attracted over fifty members, adults of all ages, varying from novice to experienced, came to talk and learn about photography.**

The club aims to provide a social network where photo enthusiasts can meet, talk, learn and have fun. Now into its fifth month, the club has gone on three outings and had several guest speakers including Bob Morrison, long term member and experienced photographer, from the Mullingar Photography Club, and Andy Mason, professional photographer and lecturer who specialises in architectural photography.

Although the club is new, there is great promise in what it can achieve through and with its members. Currently the club committee is developing a webpage that can be used by its members as a communication tool. It is also researching the possibility of a membership card that can provide discounts from photographic businesses.

Photography is often learned by exchange of information from one enthusiast to another. If you are interested in joining the club, please do contact Clare Dunne on 05793 57400 or [slievebloomphoto@gmail.com](mailto:slievebloomphoto@gmail.com).

Membership for the year is €35. A €2 donation is requested at meetings for the hire of the venue. The next meeting will be held on Wednesday 25th November 2009 at 8pm in St Mary's Parish Centre (behind the Catholic Church) Tullamore.

Article by Clare Dunne

## Lisa Fingleton talks about THE PATRONAGE AWARD

The Patronage Award is a very valuable award in that it gives 'time and space' to an artist to explore ideas and new projects. When I applied for the award I was interested in developing a contemporary project around patronage and travelling to Italy to study historical patronage. After doing some research I decided that the award would be better used by effectively becoming a patron myself to a project I really wanted to work on.

It enabled me to work with Mná Mná Ireland's only lesbian choir to create a film installation project called 'Outside I'm Singing'. In order to learn how to properly undertake this large documentary style film project I applied to participate in ESODOC (the European Social Documentary Film Programme). I was the first Irish Film maker to participate in ESODOC and spent six months working with 20 other film makers from all over Europe. We met three times in Latvia and Italy and the learning was invaluable. It would not have been possible for me to engage with this programme without the Patronage Award.

'Outside I'm Singing', documents the incredible journeys of women to the choir but also follows them over 6 months as they create their own rockabilly musical called, 'The Farmer's Daughter'. This work was selected out of 200 submissions for the Claremorris Open this year and I was delighted to receive the Emerging Artist Award 2009. Tom Morton, adjudicator of COE '09 and Curator at the Hayward Gallery, London described the work as 'a brave and moving piece in which the value of human difference is joyfully affirmed'.

An award like the Patronage Award is critically important as it allows artists to have time to breathe. So much arts funding is tightly linked to predestined outcomes and goals. In reality, creativity is a more circular than linear process and it is wonderful to be supported to move in this way towards outcomes that might not have been imaginable at the start of a process.

I am extremely grateful for the support of Laois County Council. I feel that the Patronage Award is a very visionary award and hope that will continue to support and inspire artists long into the future.



Lisa at work on the beach in Latvia



Lisa filming on Mount Etna



Happy Out!

# National Campaign for the Arts

## Who we are

The National Campaign for the Arts is a broad and inclusive coalition that reflects the scale, reach and diversity of the arts in Ireland today. Its membership has a national reach that includes major festivals, venues, producers and representative organisations and individual artists in the visual arts, theatre, film, dance, music, literature, architecture and the collaborative arts.



## Why the arts are central to economic and social recovery

### 1. The arts and our reputational capital

Every day without fail, on the world's cinema screens, bookshelves, theatres and concert stages, Irish artists are our perpetual trade mission, defending and redeeming our global reputation at a time when it is under the most rigorous scrutiny, and offering the most spirited riposte to the perception of a nation in duress. We are economically bloodied, we are culturally unbowed.

### 2. The arts and the creative economy

Since long before the term existed, the arts have been our greatest creative industry, and today the arts brilliantly foster those attributes so important to the smart economy that is vital to our future collective wellbeing. Lateral thinking, big ideas, resourcefulness and invention, problem solving, vision and originality find full expression in the output of Irish artists, and their work percolates every walk of Irish life. Our artistic community is a nerve that flexes the creative economy muscle.

### 3. The arts and cultural tourism

There is a reason that visitors are still compelled to travel here in their thousands, dispersing billions in our local economies in the process. Cultural tourism is a genuine growth industry in Ireland, and just as with our landscape and heritage, the arts have a starring role in how we give our visitors a unique cultural experience, from our mighty international festivals of the performing arts to our vivid traditional music by a convivial fireside hearth. Long before they arrive, it's our writers, filmmakers and touring performers who whet their appetite to come.

### 4. The arts and employment

Culture and the creative sector generate 170,000 jobs, a significant ratio of them in the arts, among them practitioners, technicians, producers, curators, publishers and the other highly skilled disciplines that work together to create art from Ireland. We are an indigenous industry, active in every county, we are wholly Irish owned and we are exporters. Our earnings are not repatriated, and we are spending locally.

### 5. The arts and the national psyche

Our artists steer a course for shore when the waters around us become uncertain. They are a celebration of our shared gift for self expression, our capacity for resilience and reinvention, and a mechanism for us to heal and resonate, understand and reconnect. The artist's voice is woven into our discourse, reconciling the past, imagining a future, and as important now as at any of the precipitous moments when our forefathers called upon its counsel. The citizenship of the artist is always active.

## What can you do

Familiarise yourself with our message & use this when talking to your local politicians. Have a look at our **Take Action** session on [www.ncfa.ie](http://www.ncfa.ie) where you will find more information about joining your local arts worker group and other ways you can connect and follow our work.

National Campaign for the Arts, c/o Theatre Forum, 1st Floor,  
67 Middle Abbey Street, Dublin 1, Ireland [info@ncfa.ie](mailto:info@ncfa.ie) +353(0)1 8746582.

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