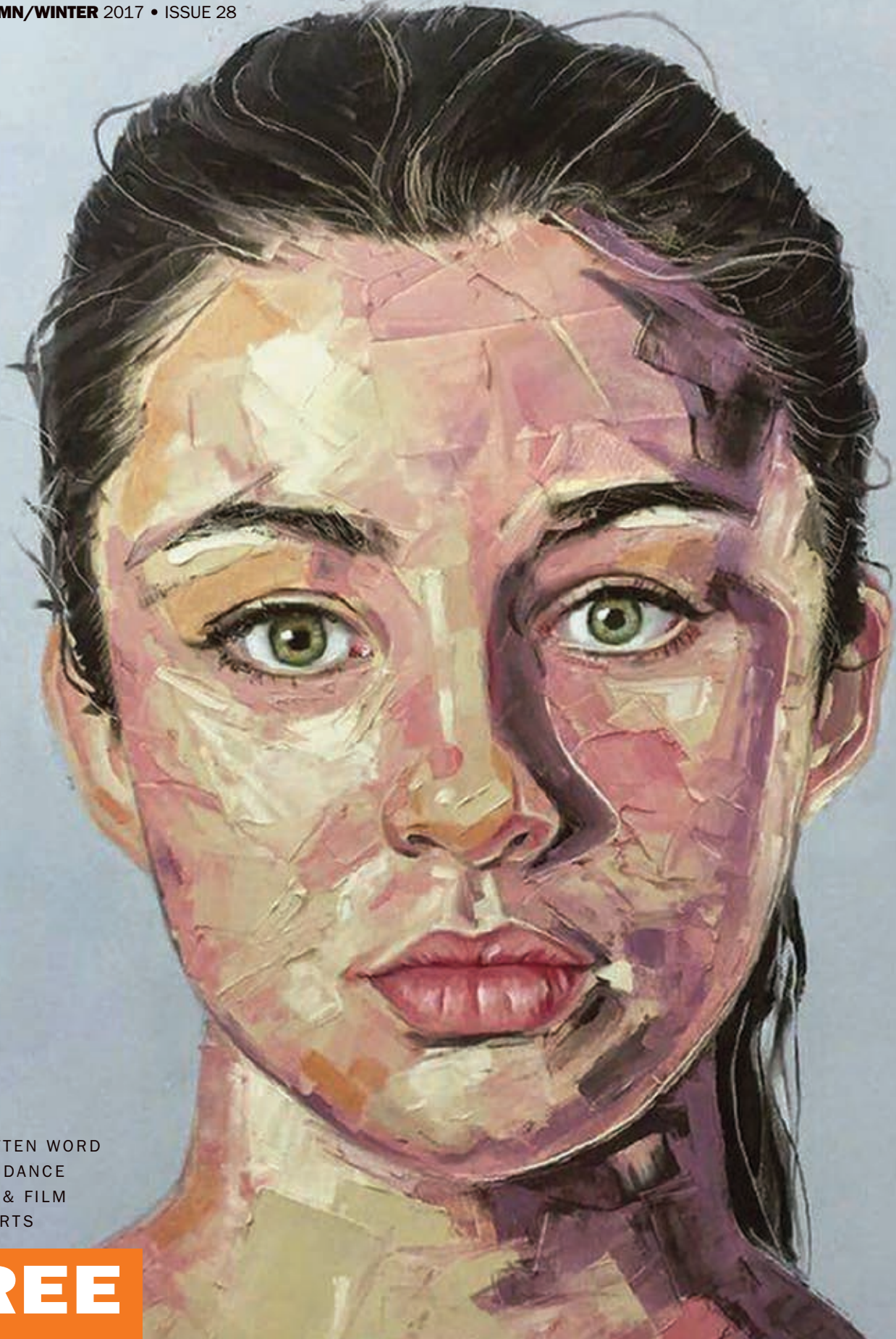


Midlands Arts and Culture Magazine

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

AUTUMN/WINTER 2017 • ISSUE 28



THE WRITTEN WORD
MUSIC & DANCE
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VISUAL ARTS

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MidlandsArts andCultureMagazine

A look inside

A Cross to Bear	Page 2
Ballyfin for Cuisle • Harry Kernoff.....	Page 3
Painted Skies • JP Dunleavy	Page 4
Kubrick by Candlelight	Page 5
Laois Leaves	Page 6
Open Air Art Gallery	
Maria Edgeworth	Page 7
Ferbane's World of Wonder	Page 8
Memory has a Pulse.....	Page 9
Laois Culture Night	Page 10
Chasing Abbey	
Urban Village Renewal	Page 11
Contemporary Dance	Page 12
Stop and Sit.....	Page 13
Claire Guinan Expo • Digital art.....	Page 14
New Lease of Life in St John's	Page 15
Cua – Song of Hollow	Page 16
Live and Classical	
Scripts	Page 17
Gaeilge in the Arts	Page 18/19
in the Midlands	
An Irish expo in Paris	Page 20
Recyclable Jungle	
Tionól	Page 21
A Holey Place	
Embracing the Arts	Page 22
Culturally Curious	Page 23
Pollinators.....	Page 24
Simon James Smith	Page 25
Purple Onion • Geraldine O'Neill.....	Page 26
Dean Crowe Hall	Page 27
Dunamais Caroline	
Westmeath Culture Night	Page 28
Longford Arts Centre.....	Page 29
Four Artists Laid in a Liine.....	Page 30
Paul Moore Exhibition	
Magical Lugh	Page 31
Chairs and Champoning	
Longford is buzzing	Page 32
Niall Lynam	Page 33
Young Laois Artists	Page 34
Niall Horan and the Academic	
Dunamais Boran/Loughman	Page 35
Niamh Algar	
Tapestry of Light.....	Page 36



A CROSS TO BEAR

Religion and Homosexuality portrayed in Longford photographer's work

The work of a Longford photographer has been selected to appear in the Centre of Fine Art Photography in Fort Collins, USA. Shelley Corcoran was thrilled when she found out she got through the submission and judging process because of the high standard of the other artists' work.

The theme of the exhibition is Photography as Response, with an emphasis on artists having a responsibility to critique and inform the world, and Shelley's subject choice of Religion and Homosexuality did just that.

"I chose homosexuality and its connection with religion because I have very close friends who are homosexual and I have been brought up a Roman Catholic, which is very important to me," Shelley explained.

"Most religions are based on the foundations of 'love one another', but due to maybe political or other influence, exclusion of certain people, such as homosexuals have been seen by the members of a particular religion. I want to focus on the religious teachings and quotes from religious figures both historically and nowadays that support religion as all-inclusive."

For her artwork, Shelley positioned her models as a cross, symbolising 'a cross to bear', defined as 'an unpleasant situation or responsibility that you must accept'.

"Exclusion may have been something some people had to bear in the past, but today, acceptance is the norm. With blue skies, sun shining and very much a contemporary look to my image, through the models and graffiti in the background, it gives the sense of positive change. The open space where I photographed it gives the sense of freedom and forward thinking."

"I am very excited to have my work displayed to an international audience in such an outstanding gallery as the Centre for Fine Art Photography," she concluded.

YOUR LOCAL ARTS OFFICERS



County Offaly

WHO: Mary Brady
(Temporary Arts Officer)
WHERE: Offaly County Council,
Charleville Road, Tullamore
CONTACT: Telephone 057 9357400
arts@offalcoco.ie.
www.offaly.ie/arts



County Westmeath

WHO: Miriam Mulrennan
WHERE: Westmeath County Council
County Buildings, Mullingar
CONTACT: Telephone 044 93 32016
arts@westmeathcoco.ie
www.westmeathcoco.ie



County Laois

WHO: Muireann Ní Chonail
WHERE: Laois County Council,
Portlaoise, Co Laois
CONTACT: Tel: 057 8664109
mnichonail@laoiscoco.ie
www.laois.ie/arts



County Longford

WHO: Fergus Kennedy
WHERE: Longford County Council,
Great Water St. Longford.
CONTACT: Tel: 086 8517595
fkennedy@longfordcoco.ie
www.longfordcoco.ie/arts_office.html



HARRY KERNOFF: The Little Genius on view in the Library...

By Gearoid O'Brien

Westmeath County Library Service prides itself on the eclectic collection of Irish art which is displayed in its larger branch libraries. In recent times two important paintings from the collection, one by Norah McGuinness (1901-1980) and one by Paul Henry (1876-1958) were loaned to prestigious national exhibitions.

In a collection assembled over the past fifty years, with the support of successive county librarians, we have examples of work by artists of both local and national importance. Local artists represented in the collection include: May Raleigh, Tom O'Reilly, Diarmuid Larkin, Peter McCabe and Liam C. Martin as well as living artists including Lorcan Walshe, Terence O'Connell and Maree Bannon.

A couple of years ago, in an unprecedented act of generosity, one of our patrons offered us a picture on loan for the collection. The patron, who wished to remain anonymous, has loaned us a picture which has attracted a great deal of attention since it was first displayed in the Aidan Heavey Library in Athlone early last year.

It is the work of one of the leading Irish artists of the twentieth century, Harry Kernoff RHA (1900-74). 'Swings' is a vibrant watercolour dating from 1930 which captures the fun and excitement of a fair-ground of the time. The main feature of the picture, the five colourful swing-boats mounted on a wooden frame, shows great attention to detail. A fair-ground attendant is using a wooden pole to bring one of the swing-boats to a halt. Some of the figures, especially the couple in the bottom right-hand corner are influenced by the work of his favourite teacher, Sean Keating. The lighting of the picture is remarkable reflecting the reality of early electric lighting generated on site to improve the safety of the fair-ground at night.

One of the most interesting aspects of the painting for me is the couple in the bottom left-hand corner of the picture. Harry Kernoff was very fond of painting himself into his pictures and we can only speculate that the gentleman with the brown hat is indeed the artist himself. But who is his consort wearing red ear-rings? I believe, given the date of the picture, that the mystery lady is, most likely, Madame 'Toto' Bannard-Cogley, a 'dramatic-looking woman of French upbringing' as described by Kevin O'Connor in his book 'Harry Kernoff: the little genius'. Pop into Athlone Library and see the picture for yourself...you won't be disappointed!

COMMUNITY THEATRE *Ballyfin*

Community theatre is alive and well in Laois ... especially in Ballyfin. In 2017, 'THE WAKE' filled both the Mountmellick Arts Centre and The Dunamase Theatre, Portlaoise to capacity. Over the past five years, the plays have been written and produced by Ballyfin playwright Frances Harney. They developed stage craft and community spirit, but most of all they provided a great night out for all the family while raising much needed funds for the local community, GAA, Parish and Athletics Club. In addition, the intermission raffle raised about €1,500 for the Cuisle Cancer Centre in Portlaoise.

This year's production will be 'THE INSPECTOR'. The plot centres around two elderly brothers running a small hotel in a rural Midland's town. The decision to renovate the hotel brings more problems than the boys have envisaged. 'THE INSPECTOR' runs for two nights, 23rd and 24th of March 2018 in the Mountmellick Arts Centre, starting at 7.30pm each night. Tickets, at €10, will be available from mid-February and may be purchased from Ó Horaín's shop in

Mountmellick. In Ballyfin tickets will be available from The Deadman's Inn, Ballyfin National School and from members of the Parish Council and Ballyfin Athletics' committee.

In these farcical comedies a huge cast of characters takes to the stage excelling in physical and verbal humour interspersed with song, dance and music. Frances believes that comedy has universal appeal. She believes that seeing ordinary people grappling with highly improbable events is "the stuff of life".

While none of this could happen without Frances' enormous commitment, she is quick to acknowledge the cast, crew and a loyal audience "without whom none of this would be possible". She concludes that, "these plays have truly been by the people, with the people and for the people".

Follow the progress of 'THE INSPECTOR' on Facebook @BallyfinParish from February 2018

'THE INSPECTOR' has received support from Ballyfin House Hotel and Laois County Council.



Mr PJ O'Gorman, chairman of The Cuisle Cancer Support Centre accepting a cheque for €1,500 presented by Ms Frances Harney, Fr Joseph Brophy, Mr Patrick O'Rourke, Fr Patrick Hennessy and the cast of 'THE WAKE'.



Rising Stars

Painted Skies taking Longford by storm

Longford is known across the country for its home-grown talent and numerous popular bands that have come on the scene over the last few years. And one of the latest young bands to gather a following is Indie/Alternative group Painted Skies

The band is made up of Maryann Lynch, Conor O'Brien, Adam Farrell and Adam Fenelon and has a number of influences, such as John Mayer and Oh Wonder. But much of everyday life also inspires this young group when it comes to producing top class original music.

"When I asked Adam Fenelon about (what inspires him), he told me that he uses his experience with life and how he sees the world to fuel the music," said band manager Peadar Kenny.

"Adam Farrell said creating meaningful lyrics that tell a story people can hear and understand when listening to the music is what motivates and inspires him to write music."

Of course, what really keeps a band going isn't its inspiration, but how its members work as a team: "The band has a great chemistry as, behind it all, they are just a group of friends playing music together."

The band's debut single, 'Constellations' has enjoyed great success, having hit number 41 on the iTunes charts and number 10 on the iTunes alternative charts. The single is available on most platforms including; iTunes, Spotify, YouTube and Soundcloud.

To keep up to date on the recording process and future gigs, follow Painted Skies on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.

JP Donleavy

James Patrick Donleavy, novelist, playwright and artist born 23 April 1926; died 11 September 2017

J.P. Donleavy, though New York born lived in Westmeath since the early 1970s. Donleavy said of his links to Ireland ((both his parents were Irish) that it "instilled the subtlety of Europe in him". He served in the U.S. Navy during World War II and came to Ireland in 1946 under a U.S. government sponsored scheme for ex-servicemen. He embarked on a course of study in Trinity College (studying bacteriology) and soon fell into the Bohemian lifestyle in Dublin numbering among his friends Brendan Behan.

Donleavy was the author of over 20 novels the best known of which is the 'The Ginger Man' (1955) which remained banned in Ireland until the 1970s. It sold many millions of copies worldwide (the Irish Times estimates 50 million) and became a successful West End play in 1959 with Richard Harris in the title role. His play is 'Fairy Tale of New York', had its title borrowed by Shane McGowan of The Pogues for his hit song. Apart from his enormous output as a writer both of fiction and non-fiction Donleavy was also a visual artist who has exhibited his work widely since the late 1940s. He wrote and painted extensively at his home on the shores of Lough Owel.

The film rights for 'The Ginger Man' were optioned many times, most recently for a version starring Johnny Depp, however – as yet plans for a production have not materialised.

Midlands Arts and Culture Team and readers extend their condolences to the family and friends of J.P. Donleavy.





KUBRICK by Candlelight



The recipient of the 2016 Film Offaly bursary DAVID O'REILLY gives Midlands Arts & Culture magazine the background to the making of the award winning short film Kubrick by Candlelight. The film was screened at the recent Offline festival in Birr.

GETTING THE BURSARY

It was a fantastic endorsement of the script having reached the final eight from over a hundred scripts and then of course to win the Award was both a further endorsement and a reality check – we now had to make it! Whilst filming is expensive and probably way more expensive than we had considered, the Film Offaly and Filmbase funding gave us the starting point to gather crew, costumes, hire equipment and start to build the foundations of a proper film production. Film Offaly's support before and during filming was essential – whether it was contacts for locations, hotel discounts, local crew and even short notice road closures. They are the one stop shop for filming.

FILMING IN TULLAMORE

As you'd hope with my day job (location scout) the choice of locations was important. The unbelievable support from Dudley Stewart and his team at Charleville Castle was invaluable and I think the production value of Charleville will speak for itself. Outside the Castle in the nearby fields the help of David Hutton Bury and his family was also invaluable. In the town itself we filmed in Bob Smyth's Pub and in the streets. We shot outside three churches across town with a vintage car in about 90 minutes. We recreated Dun Laoghaire port behind the Heritage Centre with a bit of smoke, a wet down and some of our extras and vintage vans (and some amazing camera work from Stil Williams, our DOP and his camera and grip crew).

So with all these 1970s vehicles, a large group of extras, beautiful locations, vintage camera equipment in front of the camera and state of the art camera equipment behind the camera we set off for four long and cold days of filming in Tullamore. And like all filming it was a brutal fight against time, light and the level of ambition and scale I wanted for the film. The results are more than worth it – whether it's the beautiful performances of Darragh and Amy who have great chemistry on screen, the stunning cinematography from DOP Stil Williams and his super talented crew, all of our supporting actors and extras, costumes and locations.

Filming in Tullamore, my home town and the place I spent every summer holidays of my youth, was a real treat and it was great fun to have my parents, aunts and uncles and cousins all appear as extras. Special mention to my cousin Gavin Cowley (from Tullamore) who not only designed some of our posters but also served as Music Supervisor and if you listen carefully actually sings in the film!

OFFLINE

Myself and the whole KBC team had a fantastic time at Offline Film Festival. There was no better place to launch our Irish festival run than in the county in which we filmed Kubrick By Candlelight. And to see so many friends, relatives, extras and companies that supported us at the Theatre was a real treat.

There was a tremendous reception for the film on the Friday night and the feedback about my location scouting workshop from the various schools that attended was really positive. I hope that my talk about the films I have worked on and the process of making films inspired a few students to think about entering the film industry and lessen the feeling that it is an impossible career to pursue.

Having Darragh O'Toole, Amy Hughes, Mike Nolan, Mark Griffin and Alan Curran along for the screening and the Q&A was a testament to their commitment to the film but also the draw of Offline and Birr to actors, filmmakers and audiences.

I'd like to thank Gary and all of the Offline and Birr Theatre Team for their support and also to Clodagh and Emma at The Art Lounge Chestnut Bar for allowing me to put on my kubrickperspectives photography exhibit which also got a very strong and positive response.

It was great to be part of such a positive and inclusive cultural event in a beautiful part of Ireland. I can't wait to come back to Birr and Offline.

We're now on a festival run which sees us at the Kerry Film Festival (where the film is nominated for Best Irish Narrative), Richard Harris International Film Festival in Limerick and at the Waterford Film Festival (the actual location of Barry Lyndon's mid 70s filming) with more dates to announce soon.

Longford becomes Ireland's First Open-air Gallery of Photography



Longford was positively bursting with creativity last summer, with a range of festivals taking place, including Cruthú Arts Festival among others. But something you certainly can't have missed was the Expressions International Photography Festival - Ireland's first open-air gallery, which turned the whole of Longford town into an art exhibition.

This was the festival's third year running and, this time, the organisers decided to shake things up a bit: "The first couple of years, we had a traditional gallery space, which was great," explained Shelley Corcoran.

"But sometimes, gallery spaces can put off the general public. That's why we brought it outdoors this year. The general public; people in cars; anybody and everybody were exposed to it and we're hoping it might generate a bit of interest in art." There were a total of 50 beautiful paintings erected on lampposts, walls and buildings around Longford town at the end of July, during the Cruthú Arts Festival, turning Longford into a town of bright colours and artistic talent. "It was really good to see people just sitting and looking at the photographs. Because it was outdoors, there

were no descriptions for the photographs, so people were inclined to have their own idea of what the photograph was about," said Shelley.

"Everyone has a different way of viewing art. For example, there was a photo of a little girl crying and someone said 'that's so sad', but really, she was crying because she couldn't have jelly for breakfast. So it looks really sad, but it was really just a child being a child."

The gallery was a huge success, with scores of people walking or driving through the streets of Longford enjoying the beautiful photography on display around the town. Entries for the gallery came from all over the world, from locations with different societies, religions and cultures, and were hung up on the streets of Longford

alongside images from Longford and across Ireland.

"Longford is a midlands town not recognised enough for its art, so we're quite proud to have that and for Longford to have something innovative. We're hoping to make it even bigger next year," Shelley continued, adding that the organisers are hoping to display 100 large, colourful photographs around the town.

For more information on Expressions International Photography competition, or to keep up to date with how to enter the competition next year, keep an eye on www.longforddigitalarts.ie. You can also find Expressions Exhibition and Awards on Facebook to learn more about this year's finalists and award-winners.

LEAVES

Festival of Writing and Music 2017

The annual Leaves Festival of Writing and Music is just around the corner. Leaves celebrates the diversity and richness in today's literary, music, theatre and film scene. Leaves aims to excite and engage with audiences young and old.

This year the weekend-long programme will be held in Emo Court; the magnificent Gandon designed neo-classical house and gardens on the outskirts of Portlaoise. At the recent launch of the *Leaves* Festival in Emo Court, Festival Curator, Muireann Ní Chonaill said, "the *Leaves* Festival is a great opportunity to celebrate writers, musicians and the world of film and theatre. We are very excited to be hosting the *Leaves* weekend in the beautiful surroundings of Emo Court and there is no better place to listen to and meet writers and musicians."

Opening the weekend in the Drawing Room, Emo Court, on Friday night 10th November, at 8.00pm are poets Jean Ó Brien, Martin Figura, and Helen Ivory. They will be joined by musician, Úna Keane and the event will be chaired by Arthur Broomfield.

The Tea Rooms in Emo Court is the venue for Saturday morning's writing workshop, to be led by Helen Ivory. It runs from 10am-12.30pm on Saturday 11th November.

Returning to the Drawing Room for the rest of Saturday's events (11th November), are poets Denise Curtin, Paddy Moran, Karen J McDonnell, joined by Portlaoise born musician, Gary Dunne. This event will be chaired by Séamus Hosey and commences at 3.00pm.

To celebrate National Harp Day, Scottish harpist, Catriona McKay together with Swedish nyckelharpa player Olov Johansson, will perform a special concert. They will be accompanied by the Music Generation Laois Harpists and it commences at 5.00pm on 11th November.

Saturday evening (11th November) will feature Lisa Harding and Kevin Barry reading and discussing their novels with Sean Rocks, presenter of *Arena*, on *Radio 1* and it commences at 8.00pm. On Sunday at noon, 12th November, the Drawing Room will be the setting for the premiere of *Thresholds*. This new music commission celebrating the theme of pollination, by Ian Wilson, will be performed by saxophonist, Cathal Roche. It was funded through

the Creative Ireland Laois programme. The winning poems on the theme of pollination will be read by the prizewinners at this event. The new Laois *Spoken Word* artist, who will commence their ten month residency during the *Leaves* Festival will be introduced to the public at this gathering also. During their residency the *Spoken Word* artist will work with young people throughout the county, through secondary schools, Youth Theatre and Youthreach.

The Dunamais Arts Centre, Portlaoise has scheduled events for *Leaves*, including cinema; *My Cousin Rebecca* and the live broadcast from the Harold Pinter Theatre, London of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*. *Dubliners' Women*, by Katie O'Kelly, featuring female characters from James Joyce's *Dubliners*, will be performed.

Readings in the schools and libraries will be by Helen Ivory, Martin Figura and Alan Nolan. Booking Box Office: 0578663355 or online at www.dunamais.ie; Follow us on Facebook at *Leaves*. For more information please contact the Arts Office, Laois County Council Portlaoise, Co Laois. Email artsoff@laoiscoco.ie; Web www.laois.ie





The watercolour above shows Edgeworthstown House in 1792 with two of Maria's younger sisters playing in the hayfield outside.



Maria Edgeworth

Napoleon, Byron, The Duke of Wellington - Writer Valerie Pakenham describes how sifting through Maria Edgeworth's letters while researching her soon-to-be published book, had her keeping some very unique company...

New Year's Day, 2018 is the 250th anniversary of Maria Edgeworth's birth. The oldest daughter of Richard Lovell Edgeworth, she was born in England and packed off to boarding school at the age of seven soon after her mother's death. But aged 14, she was brought home to Edgeworthstown by her father, and it was to be her home until her death in 1849.

Edgeworthstown House is still standing, although it is now a nursing home and almost unrecognisable as the house she grew up in. But its walled garden and courtyard flourish as a horticultural school and a vibrant Edgeworth society has set up a museum of Edgeworth portraits, furniture and papers in the local rectory.

For the past seven years, I have been living with Maria at closer quarters, reading my way through hundreds of her letters from Edgeworthstown written over 57 years. During her lifetime, Maria herself always insisted that her letters were for private consumption only, and only in the 1960s, have her original family letters become accessible. They are now held in two great collections, one in the National Library of Ireland, the other in the New Bodleian Library in Oxford. In the 1970s Maria's great great niece, Christina Colvin published two books of her letters from England (1971) and France and Switzerland (1979). But no one, as far as I know, has ever gone through all Maria's letters from Ireland.

To publish her letters from Ireland in full would have meant a whole shelf of volumes. Maria's letters are often 10 or 12 pages long of closely packed writing, writing letters was essential to her being and was also essential to keeping her huge family together. Maria's father had married four times and provided her with 21 siblings, the youngest of them, Michael Pakenham Edgeworth, 44 years younger than herself.

But most of Maria's letters are also written to entertain, and they brim with humour, stories and gossip. In the early days gossip was mostly local, but after her visits abroad from 1813, there was much high level gossip sent by friends: Napoleon's foibles and life in exile, Byron's marriage, the Duke of Wellington's politics and affairs. She was also a voracious reader, and I was bowled over by the sheer range of her intellectual tastes; history and politics, novels and memoirs, botany and science. Her father, Richard Lovell Edgeworth, had been a founding member of the Lunar Society in the 1750s, a brilliant assembly of chemists and early industrialists. The roll-call of visitors to Edgeworthstown during her lifetime is often dazzling, from fellow novelists such as Sir Walter Scott, to Herschel, Babbage and Michael Faraday and the brilliant Dublin mathematician, William Rowan Hamilton.

Maria herself of course is best remembered as a novelist. And for students of literature, her letters are full of insights into her own writing, from her

early children's stories and *Castle Rackrent* (1800) to her final novel, *Helen*, (1830). But even more fascinating to me was the revelation of her practical skills. After her father's death, her oldest surviving brother, Lovell, had inherited the estate. Though kind and idealistic, he was also a secret alcoholic having spent 12 years as a prisoner of war in France. He quickly ran the family estate into enormous debt. In 1825, Maria, with the help of her stepmother, took over the management of the estate – a highly unusual role for any woman at this date. Her letters now ranged to subjects such as a suitable ration of mangelwurzel for cows, repairing cottages and paving roadways, digging out drains. By the 1840s, the estate was solvent, only of course to be hit by the horrors of the Great Famine from 1845. Aged 80, Maria rose to meet the challenge, appealing successfully for food and clothing for famine relief, and writing her last children's story, *Orlandino*, three years before her death.

Valerie Pakenham's new book, *Maria Edgeworth's Letters from Ireland, 1782 – 1849*, is to be published by the Lilliput Press in late November, 2017. It is illustrated with many original drawings and sketches by the Edgeworth family.

The watercolour attached shows Edgeworthstown House in 1792 with two of Maria's younger sisters playing in the hayfield outside.



FERBANE'S AMAZING World of Wonder

by Caroline Conway

The Creative Ireland Programme has collaboration at its core and this brief was to explore and present aspects of Offaly's Heritage through art, and to bring together Heritage, communities and artists.

Tina's work is very much focused on the amazing world of the bog, and we identified Ferbane as a community with strong links to the bog, firstly through its industrial heritage, and now, as a LIFE project site of conservation, having one of the best examples of an active raised bog in Europe.

Our first collaboration was between Tina and myself, bringing our art forms together, macro-photography and zoetrope-animation, and seeing where this could take us. We met with the organisers of Ferbane Feis Ceoil and presented a very broad set of ideas that involved celebrating the local bog, and also focussing on Mary Ward, a nineteenth century pioneering scientist and naturalist from Ferbane. These lovely people suggested we contact Brendan Ryan, who is not only the director of the local Drama Group, but also an authority on all things related to Mary Ward. In addition, they introduced us to Clare Anne Kearns, a final year science student at UCD, and also a talented musician, who volunteered to compose music for the project.

Our project was underway and the first meeting set for the Black Boot Cafe. Mary Ward had published a book in 1858 "The Wonders of Nature viewed through a Microscope". Each chapter was written in the style of a letter,

detailing different aspects of her work - "Wings of Insects", "Scales of Beetles" etc. and these would form the backbone of the project.

The mid-nineteenth century was a time of huge scientific advances and discoveries and the Victorians were expanding their visual imaginations to keep pace with the changing world. Our project extended and combined these visual discoveries, with Tina's macro-photography echoing Mary Ward's microscope work, and combining these images with Zoetrope animation, that had been invented in the 1850's. We drew inspiration from the Victorian idea of "Science as Performance", combining old and new technologies, to produce an exciting celebration of the natural heritage of the bog, and the historical and scientific heritage of Mary Ward.

The performance, at the Mary Ward Heritage Centre in Ferbane, was a large scale projection of the animated photographs, narrated through an adaptation of the chapters of the book as a series of letters, read by members of High Street Drama Group, and students from Gallen Community School, adapted by Brendan Ryan, accompanied by music composed and performed by Clare Anne Kearns.

A huge undertaking. A film of stills and Zoetrope animation; a script adaptation from an historical source; original music to be composed and performed live; actors from High Street Drama and Gallen Community School, a performance to be organised. A true collaboration!

We hope that this project will go further in promoting the heritage of the Bogs. There is a live recording of the performance, and there will also be a condensed version.



Memory has a pulse

in the heart of Longford town

The sense of smell was the first thing to awaken when walking into the old Provider's building in Longford in late September. What was that familiar scent? Further steps to the second floor of the building were met by an installment of a skeletal whale entirely made of old GAA footballs stitched together, and the childhood memories associated with that smell came flooding back.



But that's not the only interesting thing about the 'Memory has a Pulse' exhibition, which was on display for a week in Longford. In fact, all the artwork was associated in some way with old memories – old diary entries; till rolls; even items from childhood such as photographs and an old action man doll that had been buried and dug up specifically for this exhibition.

There are slabs of footpaths taken from Convent Road and Chapel Street in Longford – locations that will bring back memories to all those who frequent those parts of town. There was even a memory box, allowing people to add their own memories to the display.

"We've had about 150 students from various schools visit this exhibition," said Gary Robinson who, along with Seán Cotter and Thomas Brezing, created the exhibition.

"It's great to have students in here and to be able to show them that you don't have to follow a structure to set up an exhibition."

The exhibition was set up in association with Engage – a group set up by artists in Longford for artists in Longford, and a group which has enjoyed plenty of support from the local community and the former owners of the building which now houses the group's exhibitions.

"We kicked off on Culture Night 2013 with the idea that we could open it to everybody. It's all free, and it's all voluntary. Over the years, the group has gotten smaller, but we've managed to keep it going. We have artists all over the country now," Gary explained.

"This building is a big development for Engage. It's like the heartbeat of the town. You can see everything from here," he added, gesturing towards two of the building's walls, which are made up entirely of windows.

"And people have a connection with the building too. It was a hardware and carpet store before. It was a pub. You could get absolutely anything here. And the McGinnity family who owned the building were very generous to engage, allowing us to use the space."

And the space certainly is perfect for an exhibition such as this. The giant skeletal whale looks right at home on the large empty floor – more at home here than in any other exhibition space, Gary points out – and the other side of the room is large enough to display a number of other installments, including the pavement and the memory box.

"What brought us all together is text," said Gary, speaking about the exhibition itself and the connection between the work of the three artists. "All of the work is based around text. It's like we're saying the same thing but in different accents. And the work itself is an invitation for people to take a closer look. People – even kids – see the text and immediately, they want to go over and try to read it."

On one of the walls is a fascinating work of art created entirely from till rolls – "I have miles and miles of till rolls," Gary laughs – painted with different colours, and hanging down like a curtain against the white of the wall.

The inspiration for this, Gary explains, drawing on one of his own memories, was that one of his three little girls picked up a piece of paper from the ground and told him to hold it. He turned the paper over and saw it was a till receipt, with the date January 2nd 2012, and the time 2.02 which, he points out, was the exact time that his daughter was born.

"These till rolls are from shops around Longford and they've been painted. I see them as documentation, because they're a snapshot of what was happening at a particular time. You have the name of the person behind the till, the date, the time, and what the customer bought."

In fact, the whole exhibition is based on the idea of a snapshot in time. Lines of text, birthday wishes and other memories grace the numerous paintings on the walls. Some pieces show memories covered in paint, but with some of the paint scratched off to reveal what's underneath.

"This is a touring exhibition," said Gary, pointing out that it's already travelled to Dublin and Galway and has plans to travel to the College of Art in the Burren, before moving on to other possibilities. Wherever it ends up next, it's certainly worth a look and will awaken long-forgotten memories of your own.

For more information on Engage, visit www.visuallongford.ie.

THAT Good Thing

On the week leading up to their debut solo show in The Academy Dublin, Chasing Abbey talked to Ciara Kelly about the whirlwind of touring, signing to a label and blurring the lines of genres.

Tullamore natives Ro, Bee and Teddy C met in secondary school, and while they acknowledge their origins in trad and folk music, a pivotal moment for them came about when they performed a version of hit song *Crazy* by Gnarlz Barkley for a *Midlands 103* talent competition. This bending of genres solidified a direction for the group as initial attempts to describe their style result in Teddy C listing everything from Pop to Grime and Hip Hop.

National attention around Chasing Abbey started with their single climbing to the top of the Shazam charts in Ireland, interest from labels soon followed with the band recently inking a deal with *3 Beat UK/Universal Music Group*. On the path to signing, creative control as a priority is echoed by each of the lads, who are embedded in the production aspect of the music as well as energetic live performances.

It is fair to say that in today's musical climate, gigging is the most important part of a commercial career, and Chasing Abbey understand this all too well. When asked about the live element of their music, they each emphasise the need to make music that connects with a crowd whether it be through audience chants or the visceral reaction of a thumping trap beat. Ro comments on their favourite gig so far, playing *Indiependence* Festival in Cork and how the arena went from empty to full

in the space of 15 minutes, turning their initial nerves into memorable elation.

Joining fellow midlands band the Blizzards on stage at Electric Picnic in Laois was another highlight mentioned, with the group speaking highly of frontman Bressie, with whom they immediately clicked; "We met him through our manager Shane and just got on really well, he talks like us, has the same interests" recalls Teddy C. On the subject of the Irish music landscape, Bee lists a plethora of talent, particularly from the midlands and how exciting it is to be part of this scene.

Beyond Ireland, Chasing Abbey have their sights set on the UK scene, and when asked about potential collaborations, household names such as grime artists Stormzy and Tinie Tempah are among their ambitions.

The group have a strong affinity with all things hip hop, broaching the stigma of Irish artists rapping. Teddy C is not concerned with the naysayers. Debut single *That Good Thing* is in national radio rotation and features a rap verse, the success of which initially surprised the trio as they expected it to be more listener friendly across the pond. Emphasising authenticity, Bee speaks on the growing Urban scene in Ireland, which has an equally growing fan base.



Collectives such as *Word Up* (a group based in Dublin) made up of musical creatives who galvanised and are making a tangible impact on the Irish music scene carved out a name for themselves with monthly showcases in the capital and illustrate the importance of community for upcoming acts. Perhaps utilising a model like *Word Up* as well as social media, young midlands musicians have a shot at promoting their talents to a broader audience. When speaking to the lads about this they emphasise the importance of surrounding yourself with not only creative individuals but also those who support and believe in your talent and goals.

As for future releases Chasing Abbey are not short on material, as illustrated in the varied and high energy live sets. The lads acknowledge they have enough in the vault for an album but come across as wanting to continue experimenting and progressing with Ro expressing interest in working with a female vocalist.

Chasing Abbeys latest single *That Good Thing* is available on all streaming sites and you can keep up to date with the band on all social media platforms including www.facebook.com/ChasingAbbey/

Culture Night in Laois

Culture Night in Laois was a great success with 21 separate events happening in the county on Friday 22nd September.

The highlight event included *Anam* - Siamsa Tíre, The National Folk Theatre of Ireland performance at the Dunamais Arts Centre where the packed theatre were mesmerized by performances by four world-class step dancers from the US, Canada and Ireland including Matthew Olwell (Appalachian Flat Foot) Jonathan Kelliher (North Kerry "Munnix") Nathan Pilatzke (Ottawa Valley, Canada) and John Fitzgerald (Modern Irish) in an exhilarating fusion of dance styles with live music and song by Fergal Ó Murchú, Mikey Smith (pipes & tin whistle) and Joseph McNulty (bodhrán & guitar). The audience took to their feet at the end of the show in appreciation of the amazing show that they had witnessed.

The weather stayed fine for a colourful and entertaining outdoor **Samba Drum Performance** at The Plaza, Áras an Chontae, Portlaoise, led by drumming specialist Peter Crann and visiting Samba Band "Itchy Feet Drummers"

from Sligo who were joined by members of the Music Generation Laois Samba group and children from the Holy Family School, Portlaoise.

Exploring Cultural Connections – at the Parish Centre, in Portlaoise was also a huge success with a great crowd attending to enjoy a myriad of performances and displays including; Lithuanian dancing, a Polish traditional dress display, a Syrian singing group and traditional Irish dancing and music. Visitors got the opportunity to try a traditional Irish musical instrument with Portlaoise Comhaltas and join in the exploration of different cultures.

Also in Portlaoise a late night event **The Equinox : Live Art** at Kavanaghs brought in the audiences to enjoy a night dedicated to experimental dance, video art, storytelling, live painting, and poetry. Earlier in the day students enjoyed storytelling with renowned storyteller Jack Lynch at Portlaoise

Library and art lovers enjoyed the opening of Bennie Reilly New Works at the Dunamais arts Centre.

Stradbally Arthouse Gallery opened for extended hours to showcase **'Time and Space'** - A Celebration of Texaco Children's Art Success in Laois, curated by Lucy Deegan, this year's winner of the competition and the 2017 Laois Culture Night Ambassador. The exhibition included the winning painting and eight other works by Lucy and work by young Laois artists who featured highly in the competition including: Ciarán Leonard (age 13), Asma Zulfiqar (age 14), and Abdul Ahad Zulfiqar (age 6). Artworks originated from the Texaco Children's Art Competition on loan by kind permission of Valero Energy (Ireland) Limited.

Ballyfin hosted two very successful events as traditional music lovers enjoyed an evening of music, dance, song, stories, cúpla focal agus cupán tae at An



Westmeath HERITAGE

Westmeath's recently appointed Heritage Officer Melaine McQuade describes how buildings and walkways in Westmeath are set to benefit as the Urban and Village Renewal scheme brings a new lease of life to sites of Heritage value in the county

The recent announcement of €21 million funding for urban and village renewal projects across the country was a welcome one, with the amount of grant money double what was offered last year when the scheme was first introduced. Westmeath will benefit to the tune of €596,000, which will fund a variety of projects across the county. Several of these projects will focus on sites of heritage value, for example there are plans to restore historic buildings in Streamstown and Rahugh and an old mass path in Killucan, Rathwire.

In Streamstown grant money will be spent restoring the Railway Station buildings. The station opened in 1851 and several years later Streamstown junction opened serving the Dublin – Galway line and the Streamstown – Clara Line. In 1963, after over 100 years of service, Streamstown station closed and rail traffic continued to decline over the years until the line finally went out of use in the early 2000s. All that

remains of the railway buildings now is a waiting shelter and former goods shed, both rather run down. These old railway structures are located along 'the Old Rail Trail' and their restoration will undoubtedly enhance them as a point of interest along the route. Cyclists and walkers on this stretch of the trail may catch a glimpse of the restoration works as they progress.

Some of the funding secured by Rahugh will go towards restoration works on the late 19th-century building referred to as the 'Teacher's Residence'. The architectural inventory suggests that this building, which is adjacent to the church, may originally have been built as a parochial house. Whatever its original purpose, the building was recently used as a community centre but has now fallen into disrepair. Restoring this structure to its original character will not only give it a facelift but will also offer the opportunity of renewed life and possibly an entirely new function to the building.

One of the plans to benefit from grant aid in Killucan, Rathwire is the restoration of an old mass path. The tradition of walking to mass may have dwindled, but the path is a public right of way, and its restoration will continue the memory of those who walked this route to mass over the years while at the same time offering a pleasant walking track for local access.

These are just a few of the projects planned around Westmeath that will bring a renewed sense of pride of place and cultural expression through heritage. Restoring buildings to their former glory and reviving the memory of some of our historic buildings and walkways, will give them a new lease of life that may well have a knock-on economic benefit.

Sean Chistin and artist Kevin McCann opened his studio to welcome visitors to see where and how he creates his artwork with refreshments and some music added in.

Mountrath also enjoyed an open Studio event as design Studios 'Figure2Ground' artists welcomed a large group of visitors into their showroom at the Left Bank House to view their amazing designs and enjoy music and some refreshments.

Tours of our heritage sites included entry to Emo Court for two free tours of the House and the exhibition on show "Through the Eyes of Father Browne" – and Roundwood House opened their doors this year to visitors to enjoy a tour of their beautiful Georgian period home and grounds. Owners Paddy and Hannah Flynn were delighted with the response and the level of interest shown in this event.

In **Mountmellick Library** a landscape painting demonstration by artist Tom Joyce was a great draw and was booked out early and a large crowd turned out to enjoy a reading by local author Sheelagh Coyle, from stories of her life and experiences.

The Hawthorne Bar in **Portarlinton** hosted a very successful traditional evening with Portarlinton Comhaltas Group and art lovers turned out in strength for the opening of an Exhibition of Paintings 'The Fight for Colour and Wonder' by new young artist Melissa Donagher at the French Restaurant in the French Quarter in Portarlinton.

Rathdowney Mens' Shed also opened their doors to the public for an evening of music, song and the spoken word and to display their wonderful woodcraft.

Comhaltas groups in Laois had a busy evening with Spink Comhaltas hosting a wonderful traditional evening at Spink Community Hall and Camross Comhaltas hosting two shows in the Poets' Cottage in Camross. Members of Ratheniska Comhaltas also brightened the evening for residents of Droimnin Nursing Home, Stradbally with traditional Irish music performances for residents, family and friends.

The Arts Office are delighted with the level of participation and the level of fun that was had on

the night and wishes to thank all those involved in organising events in Laois. Next year's programme is already being planned and we hope for greater participation and more events to be added.

Culture Night is brought to you by the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht and the Creative Ireland Programme in partnership with Laois County Council. An Roinn Ealaíon, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta a dhéanann comhordú ar an Oíche Chultúir, i gcomhpháirt le Comhairle Chontae Laoise.



CONTEMPORARY DANCE AT THE Backstage Theatre

This autumn, Backstage Theatre, Longford is embarking on an exciting project with their artist in residence, choreographer and dancer Catherine Young, redeveloping her highly acclaimed work 'Welcoming the Stranger'.

'Welcoming the Stranger' is a moving and compelling dance piece inspired by the stories of migrants and refugees from Gaza, Iraq, Syria, Africa. The piece was first commissioned as part of the 1916 Casement Project celebrations to premiere on Banna Strand.

In light of the location – a beach and the on-going migrant crisis, with refugees being washed up on shores daily – Catherine wanted to create a work that looked at how Ireland *could* be if there was real understanding and inclusion between communities. That if Roger Casement were to wash up on Irish shores 100 years later, what kind of Ireland would he want to see?

Since its premiere, this critically acclaimed piece has performed at the Ramallah Contemporary Dance Festival in Palestine as well as Culture Night Dublin and The Big Bang Festival, to name but a few.

In this redevelopment of the piece, Catherine will be working with people throughout Longford – locals to the area and those from overseas who have come to call Longford their home. She will bring both communities together through a series of workshops and rehearsals throughout October and November, culminating in a performance in Backstage on Fri 15 December alongside a group of world-class professional dancers and musicians.

Through these workshops and rehearsals, the Irish and migrant communities in Longford will come together to move and be moved, sharing their stories, their culture, their music, their food, their language as Catherine gently guides the group towards the creation of a work for performance.

Kids dancing alongside adults; a multi-generational, multi-ethnic work where rhythm is the common language not English; this true coming together of people and cultures, through their music, dance and song is set to inspire audiences locally to embrace cultural difference and will provide an opportunity for new migrants to engage with people from the local community, encouraging them to become involved with arts activities and arts organisations on a long-term basis.

'Welcoming The Stranger' has been overwhelming for both the participants and the audiences alike. It has moved people profoundly and is a real testament to social inclusion and the value and richness of cultural diversity, showing that we are more similar than different and we have a lot we can share and learn from each other.

Projects like this break down barriers, bring people together in a very close and real way and through the creation of art, allow participants to

form strong bonds of friendship and solidarity with each other, getting rid of preconceived notions and biases.

The invitation to perform in the Ramallah Contemporary Dance Festival in Palestine in 2017 was a statement of intent by the people of Ireland to play our part in welcoming the stranger in the future.

The Arts, and dance in particular transcends politics, religion and language and can work to bring people together and towards integration. In present times, we need more art and projects like these to forge a way forward through the negativity and shine some light on how things could be.

Backstage Theatre have joined forces with Shawbrook Dance in Legan, Co Longford, who are providing accommodation, technical supports and expertise for the project which is also supported by Co Longford Arts Office, Longford County Council and the Dept of Justice Integration Fund.

Tickets and further information on Welcoming the Stranger are available on 043 33 47888 or www.backstage.ie





Stop & Sit

by Julie Spollen

Wherever or whatever the day to day humdrum is, access to the arts enables an ability to offload contemporary stresses. Creative spaces, physical or mental, have the ability to provide us with both a means to expression and a sanctuary.

Health humanities and a realisation of the unquantifiable benefits the arts have for our health is here to stay. Accessible creative spaces, where people cross between disciplines, may solve some of the health, social and care issues of our times. For me it is important to advocate the arts role in rehabilitation, recovery, care and daily living.

Anam Beo, the arts, health and wellbeing organisation in Offaly and Orlagh Claffey, General Manager of Midland Regional Hospital, Tullamore discussed possibilities of arts and health within the hospital community. The project *Stop and Sit* became an opportunity for interested staff to engage with an arts practise. To not only demonstrate the positive dynamics within the hospital but also learn how to navigate a participatory arts practise in a busy environment.

So how do the arts, health and wellbeing fit within a hospital? Certain logistical fences must firstly be cared for and embraced. Seeing that staff are very much engaged with their job in hand and realising that contemporary workloads would not allow traditional facilitated art sessions. There needed to

be a practice where there was staff participation on their terms and co-creating by the artists involved.

Using the artist's skills and knowledge as arts practitioners there was an exploration of a convenient process, on this occasion we used the smart phone. Contemporary culture's transition into a digitalised and advanced age is evident daily. App technology is a tool for artists, with *quick to thumb* arts participation en masse. The voice of creative expression is in tandem with rapid technological advances in the sciences and medicine. The self portrait app in itself has become a potential for early diagnosis of certain diseases.

This project aimed to build a relationship within the hospital. An important part of the process was to engage with people, interact, communicate and have fun along the way. Staff were visited in agreed departments, during break times, on their terms and via the route of the staff canteen a wider hospital community knew we were on the premises, if they wanted to be involved with the project.

Anam Beo interacted with up to 80 people and were able to discuss the need for hospital humour and how to realise and enjoy, an accessible creativity. Participatory arts provides spaces and pockets of time providing a step for deeper collaborative experiences where participants may progress as individual creators. The project raised awareness that you don't have to be a naturally skilled drawer or portrait painter to be expressive or involved in a creative process or space.

Given the opportunity people will always remember how to play, laugh and be expressive, participatory arts can bring us to that place. Not to lose sight of these powerful interactions and the provision of opportunities for that powerful place, be it physical or mental, is important.

The challenge is to ensure that a balance exists where people can meet, communicate...nurture the body, soul and think tank... we all have the capacity for individual creative expression. It is up to contemporary society, to embrace, consider and provide access to all possibilities for our health, daily living and recovery.

This exhibition of artworks is the outcome of a visual arts project called *Stop and Sit* undertaken by Anam Beo artists, Rowena Keaveny and Julie Spollen. It encapsulates the interactions and observations with participating staff at Tullamore hospital. Anam Beo is an arts, health and wellbeing organisation working throughout offaly in partnership with Offaly County Council and Dublin Mid-Leinster HSE. This artist in residency project was a collaboration between Anam Beo, Offaly County Council Arts Office and Midlands Regional Hospital, Tullamore.

Anam Beo promotes active arts inclusion through the delivery of comprehensive arts projects in care settings and encourages creativity and empowerment through meaningful engagement in the arts. Find us at anambeo.wordpress.com and facebook.





the heart and soul of **Claire Guinan**

Music is at the heart and soul of the work of Tullamore artist Claire Guinan so it was entirely appropriate that her latest exhibition was a series of stunning portraits of Irish musicians.

“Heart and Soul: Portraits of Irish Musicians” exhibited at the prestigious Copper House Gallery in Dublin in early October, with a number of the subjects coming along in person on the night of the launch.

The colourful collection comprised a series of large scale oil paintings of many heroes of the Irish musical landscape, including Imelda May, The Coronas, John Sheahan, Lisa Hannigan, Mundy and the iconic Christy Dignam all featured.

“Music is so powerful. It can evoke memories, enhance our emotions and influence our everyday

lives. These musicians take their talent and reach deep into their heart and soul to create wonderful music that enriches our lives.

“Each and every one of these artists has added to the depth and richness of both Irish music and Irish culture.”

The talented artist is also a jewellery designer and while engagement and wedding rings strongly featured in her work, so did music with many of her beautiful pieces incorporating music notes and song lyrics.

After a two year break from painting to work on her jewellery designs Claire felt the siren call of the canvas and music and it was too much of a combination to ignore.

“I really missed painting and decided to start working on an exhibition that captured the two things I am most passionate about – portraiture and music.”

Check out Claire’s Facebook page for more details on her art and future exhibitions:
<https://www.facebook.com/claireguinanart/>

LONGFORD DIGITAL ARTS: Photographer of the Month

The project, run in conjunction with the Longford County Council Arts Office, consists of a range of videos introducing photographers and giving them a chance to showcase their work, while also giving the viewers the opportunity to see more art.

The project is all about “photographers who treat photography as not only a passion, but also a path of life”, according to Angelika Florkiewicz, who adds that the website has introduced eight photographers so far, who represent themselves through video.

“In this project, we wanted to emphasise artists because we rarely have a chance to get a closer look at the person who is on

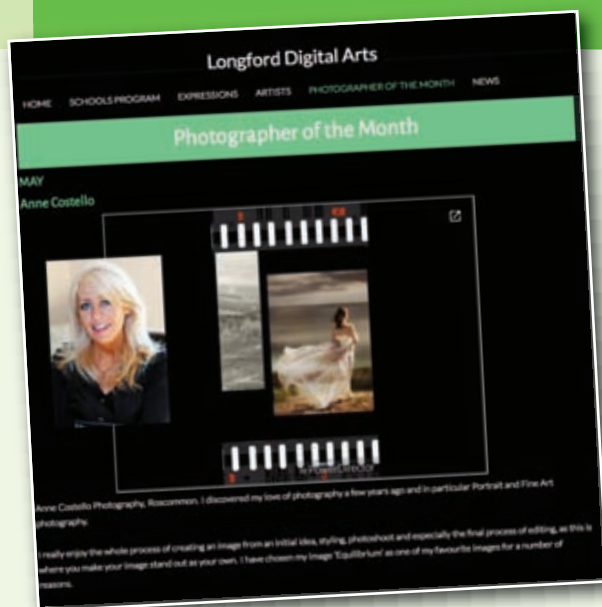
the other side of the camera,” Angelika explained.

“In the videos that photographers made for the Longford Digital Arts website, we wanted to include a presentation of their own work while also including information such as the artist’s bio and their inspirations.

“All photographers have made professional videos showing how much interest they have in photography and provide a fresh inspiration dedicated to photography for a new generation.”

For more on Photographer of the Month, see www.longforddigitalarts.ie.

The spotlight is on young Irish photographers with Longford’s ‘Photographer of the Month’, which can be found on the Longford Digital Arts website.



St John's Church Clonmellon

In July of 2017 a unique new space joined the cultural infrastructural landscape of Westmeath.

Lorena and Allen Krause have lovingly transformed St John's Church, Clonmellon, into an elegant, multi-purpose space, suited to a variety of cultural uses. Here, Westmeath Arts Officer Miriam Mulrennan chats to Lorena Krause, who is the first artist to have exhibited in St. John's – with a selection of her large-scale black and white photographs.

Q: Lorena, can you give us a bit of background on your connection with Clonmellon?

A: In 2000 we purchased Killua Castle, and that's how we got acquainted with Clonmellon. I have been living here full-time since 2008. This is home to me and my family!

Q: As a photographer - what do you find unique and/or interesting about landscapes of the midlands?

A: I would start with the clouds... the skies of the midlands are unique. You can find every kind of cloud which makes a unique background to our historical architecture. I am also fascinated by the textures on the stone buildings, which after being exposed to Irish weather for a while acquire a fascinating quality, of lichen, ivy and moss, which photographs very distinctively.

Q: Can you give us some background to your own passion for photography, what inspires your practice, where you developed your love of photography?

A: I always loved photography. I wanted to take a course in university but I could not afford it. Years later, I had the opportunity to study photography in London at Black & White Photography with Natasha Bult and Margaret Mann. It was basically working in the dark room, in black and white. I noticed since early times that my preference was for landscapes more than portraits. I was always fascinated by clouds and stones. I had a few exhibitions in London, one of them exclusively on clouds. Some were landscapes taken in Ireland – with those dramatic and spectacular skies.

Q: What attracted you to St John's Church?

A: Many years ago, my husband and the late Sir John Nugent of Ballinlough Castle, jumped over the gate to see the derelict church. About four years ago, I was helping a friend to look for a house in Clonmellon on the web and found St. John's for sale. We made an offer and before we could reflect on it, we were the happy owners of the former church. It was a pity to see it all overgrown and derelict. There was always a connection between this church and the castle, so we decided to bring it back.

Q: Where did the idea to renovate it as an arts space come from?

A: We looked at it, the space is unique. It lies at the end of a tree-lined avenue in complete peace. The village lacked a park and we thought that something for the community would be lovely. What better use than a space for the arts?

Q: What challenges and positives did you encounter in progressing the project?

A: Because we have been restoring Killua, we already had access to the right team to undertake the restoration. Nevertheless, as always with these projects, the total cost far exceeds your estimates. We also were happy to include in the design of the landscape Arthur Shackelton who, with a very simple design, brought a very lovely and peaceful setting for the grounds.

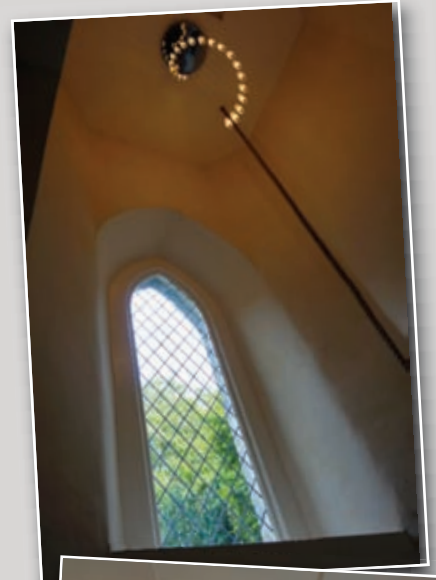
Q: What kind of activities would you ideally like to see taking place in St. John's Church? Have you a vision for how it might evolve?

A: All forms of arts, painting, sculpture, not only indoors but also in the gardens, performing arts such as music and theatre, storytelling perhaps. And remembering the sign that someone hung at The Athenaeum Club in London, "All arts shineth here save the culinary", why not, pop up restaurants...

Q: If local community groups or members of the arts community are interested in the space, what are their next steps to enquire about using it?

A: Please contact us via email at properties@montpascal.com or me directly at 087-9433636

Right now there are 14 photographs in the exhibition at St John's. The name of the exhibition is *Ghost of The Past Returns: Views Around Our Village*. All of them are about Clonmellon and its environs and Lorena Krause says of the exhibition "it was to honour the beauty of this corner of the world".





Speaking their truth with Songs from the Hollow

Anyone who has seen Laois based trio Cua play live has experienced the raw energy and honesty of their performances on stage. Now with the release of their third studio album 'Songs from the Hollow', their soul has been captured in the recording studio.

The three piece - comprising of musicians John Davidson, Shane Booth and Ros O'Meara - bring the listener on a journey from the opening track 'Atlantic Crossing' right to final offering 'Mother Earth'. This journey takes you through a spectrum of musical landscapes from emotive melodies and honest lyrics to hair raising harmonies.

The musicians' diverse musical backgrounds bring a vibrancy to the album - as you listen through you're never quite sure what is coming next, yet all tracks carry the zest and soul of their live shows. The stand-out of this album however is the uncompromising three part harmonies, especially on 'The Other Man' and 'Waco'.

Recorded at Golden Egg Studios this summer, all 15 tracks were put down in just five days. This was a very different approach to the recording of the group's self titled EP, during which each of the four tracks were recorded over a day each.

The trio say the deadline on studio time enhanced their creativity, particularly during the lead up to recording. The group made a conscious decision to work on their harmonies ahead of recording and spent many hours practicing. Although all three are experienced singers, it took many hours to fine tune the blending of their voices.

Before bringing the songs to life in the studio, they took them on the road, and ahead of recording travelled to England where they played the album to live audiences. Shane explained: "We had a few weeks of intense practice. Then we drove to England and played our gigs. Afterwards we drove 500 miles home and after one rest day, we went into the studio."

That momentum of travel and gigging carried through into recording, and definitely adds to the live feel on the album.

The trio are now in rehearsals for upcoming shows and the October release of 'Songs from the Hollow'. They spoke of their excitement and nerves ahead of this next part of the process - bringing the songs to a live audience. "When we've played in Europe we are playing two hours solid of our own material, and we are getting a great reaction from audiences," enthused John.

Ros, although nervous for the release is looking forward to this next part of the process - bringing the songs to different audiences and witnessing the evolution of the songs. "The structure is there but it's always slightly different each time we play. We are capturing the energy of the songs each time."

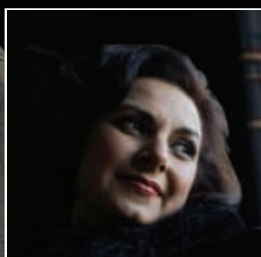
To witness this energy in person, check out one of their upcoming gigs this Winter. Details on the Cuaceol Facebook page.



Longford Live and Classical

The Backstage Theatre in Longford is home to all genres of drama, music and entertainment and, this winter, the focus will be the classics as Longford Live and Local returns to the theatre in December, presented by Charlie McGettigan.

Live and Local focuses on local talent and the classical night will feature soprano Emer Barry, accompanied on the night by Fintan Farrelly; talented Lanesboro concert pianist Peter Regan; and internationally-acclaimed soprano Regina Nathan, accompanied by pianist Mairead Hurley. And, with such top class musical talent, this will be a night classical music lovers will not want to miss. The show takes place on Friday 1 December at 8pm. Tickets are €20 each. For more information, find Longford Live and Local on Facebook.



LEADING CAST LIST:

Co-Artistic Directors: Angela Ryan Whyte and Lisa Daly, of Jasango Theatre.
Co-Producers: Emma Nee Haslam, Manager Birr Theatre & Arts Centre.
Rebecca Kelly, Marketing Manager, BTAC.
Playwright and New Writers' Mentor: Eugene O'Brien

Midlands Arts and Culture Magazine | AUTUMN/WINTER 2017



Good Scripts

by Rosalind Fanning

In a confluence of rivers and roads is Birr. In its own way an island; an elegant little isle within an inspirational outer-landscape of open-skied boglands and silhouetted hills, so characteristic of County Offaly. There are layered centuries of attraction to here, and interaction with the wide world, in spite of some ever-long, slow routes towards this country's centre. From the monastic writers of Law and Prayer to the 21st century writers, Birr attracts and inspires through its arts festivals, creative nurturing, and its residencies.

One of now five significant arts festivals in the town, and which has very much arrived this year is Scripts, Ireland's Playwriting Festival. Established in 2013 the innovative event has run steadily. But in this fourth year it's being noticed; locally of course but also realised nationally, and connecting with the national arts community. Its four-day run brought a buzz to the place, with a well-chosen and tasty programme for children and adults, writers and theatre-goers.

Co-Artistic Director, Angela Ryan Whyte said, "Everything really worked – it was a living breathing force." The number of attendees was up, through the expanded programme and having brought in really top quality, high-calibre theatre mentors, such as Jim Culleton, Artistic Director of Fishamble; Jesse Weaver, New Work Associate at the Abbey, Gina Moxley, writer, director and performer. Their workshops were sold out quickly.

Offering special weekend passes was one of the key marketing plans and contributed to visiting 'thespianites' staying for one or two full days. Although Rebecca Kelly slipped into the interview that there is 'very little marketing budget' she has been indulging in all her options to spread the word nationwide. Building on her relationship with the national media for editorials, booking radio adverts and full blaze on social media, mailing lists galore and

other connecting experiences, such as her past time with the renowned Druid Theatre in Galway.

Yet without quibble, what aided and enabled the richer programming was an increase in funding from Offaly Arts Office and the Arts Council. "Birr business people were also very supportive and embraced it", said Angela Ryan Whyte. There are (one might now say 'were') very few options, let alone venues for fresh-penned playwrights before Scripts. When Angela and Lisa were looking for a location for their budding idea, Birr with its Theatre & Arts Centre was obviously "an easy sell". The charming 19th century building provides an ideal facility; a dedicated space. With the full support for novice writers, "nurturing and staging new writing has always been our focus", says Emma Nee Haslam. Part of the Scripts team, she has also been the venue's ideal and energy-charged manager, for most of the years since its restoration.

Tall Eugene's natural, Midlands bonhomie puts shy new writers at ease. He is the keystone of the festival, and the essence of its dedicated Writers' Mentor. New writers find him very constructive. The Playwright Prize-winner spoke warmly of him (as did each of the finalists after the week they were given with him). And such that she worked willingly through the night to fulfill his suggested tunings to her final draft. In fact his work does not cease at the finish of each festival. It was also 'his big push' to have 'a big theatre piece' for this year's festival feast said one of the organising team.

Angela believes that Birr is the perfect destination for such a festival, for its centrality – 'near-enoughness to all parts East, West, North and South'. It also has 'quirky charm and is small enough to get around easily, which appeals to visitors'. She noted all this in obvious fondness. The creative synergies and this location are making the festival successful. Along

with the fáilte and friendliness of the midlands, the pretty town has the functioning necessities of accommodation, eateries with some artisan foods and joy, high functioning WiFi provision, in the ether. Some of the 'cool drinkeries' assist too! New and hopeful writers will inevitably meet and meld; being mentored by experienced writers and linking now, with notable theatre people too: all in atmospheres conducive, relaxed, informal.

The place and the people: though often far apart, the Scripts team work well together, through the fluence of conference-Skyping. They share similar goals for providing a hub of theatrical excellence. Too few words to wax lyrically on each one of them but Lisa Daly, the American member of the group, brings the international flavour and her openness. Her own elements of excellence are at work through her nurturing of young actors at a noted college in the States, some of whom she brought to the Dublin launch of the festival, earlier in the year.

All these creative people, the varied cultures and their ideas bring an added benefit to a higher quality of life in Birr. But as with its historical tradition, such qualities also spread forth, spiralling further and wider from its peaceful centre.

Rosalind and her husband Derek own Tin Jug Studio, Saint Brendan Street, Birr. Tin Jug Studio's Writers' Residency, also supported by Offaly Arts, ran partly concurrently with the festival this July. One of the four writers who had been accepted for this year's residency was Ben Payne, a British playwright who co-founded the Hoxton Street Monster Supply Store in London and The Ministry of Stories, mentoring centre for children, with best-selling author and screenwriter Nick Hornby. He was captivated by Birr, though perhaps that had as much to do with helpfulness in finding those visible connection to his ancestors.

Gaelige in the Midlands

by Manchán Magan

The profile of Irish language arts might not seem all that high in the Midlands at first glance, but appearances can be deceiving. While the Western coastal counties are normally most associated with Irish language arts practise, in fact one of the most significant Irish poets of his generation, Seán Ó Leocháin, has lived his entire life in Athlone, while the vibrant and delightful children's author, Esther Göbl Uí Nualláin, was born and bred in Longford, where she has published four Irish language books. In fact, there are a whole range of music, dance and arts practitioners working through Irish in Laois, Offaly, Longford and Westmeath.

Seán Ó Leocháin was described by Máire Mhac an as “file d'fhilí móra na Gaeilge.” He has published 13 collections of verse over 5 decades, producing a truly impressive body of work. Máire Mhac an tSaoi described it as “Filíocht aibidh, stuama... dúchasach gan bheith áirtifisialta, comhaimsireach, gan a bheith leamh. Freagraíonn an friotal agus an fhoirm gan cháin don tsbaint.”

Ó Leocháin won an Arts Council Prize in 1973 for his third poetry collection *Saol na bhfúill*. The two that preceded it were *Bláth an Fhéir* (1968) and *An Dara Cloch* (1969). In 2000 he was awarded the inaugural Michael Hartnett Award for his seventh book *Oiread na Fríde* (An Clóchomhar, 1998). The judges, Professor Declan Kiberd, Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill and Cathal Ó Searcaigh, commented that “In awarding this prize we recognise the subtlety and sophistication of this volume of poetry. This is not just a poet writing with language: here the language realises itself through the poet who has a very distinct voice. He draws on the literary tradition at no cost to his individuality; he sees the past and present, not as opposed, but as complimentary. We feel that Michael Hartnett, whose own work was insufficiently recognized during his lifetime, would have approved.”

In between those two awards came works such as *Idir Ord agus Inneoin* (1977); *In Absentia* (1980); *Aithrí Thoirní* (1986); *Bindealáin Shalaithe* (1989) and *Traein na bPúcaí* (1993). In 2011, Cló Iar-Chonnacht published a collection of his best poetry, *Cloch Nírt*, taken from nine previous books.

Ó Leocháin opted not to be interviewed for this article, and so it's left to others to portray his work: the great spiritual academic Monseigneur Pádraig Ó Fiannachta summed it up as “Tá an chaint úr, cruinn, géar... Tá tuiscint aige don lag, don aosta, don bhocht, don éislinneach, don dall, don bhalbhán.” While the poet and lecturer, Gréagóir Ó Dúill described him as “File a bhíonn dílis dá cheird, dá fhís. Mórán taitnimh tugtha aige dom thar na blianta... Níl aon trá ar an tobar seo, fiú má tá smál ar chuid de na sean-déithe teallaigh. Ó Dúill went on to compare Ó Leocháin to Sean Ó Riordáin, pointing out how their crises of consciousness

differed: “Níorbh ionann crá coinsiasa Sheáin Uí Leocháin agus crá an Riordánaigh, strus an lánúnachas i gcodarsnacht le huaigheas an aonaráin.”

Certainly, Westmeath is fortunate to have a poet of such calibre living and working in the county. In Longford, the preeminent beacon of Irish language writing is Esther Göbl Uí Nualláin who was recently seen performing at the 2017 Cruthú Arts Festival in Ardagh. She was born and bred in Longford of Austrian/Irish parentage, where she still lives with her family in a house that is somewhat of a miniature Gaeltacht.

Her first book of stories for children, *Eachtraí Uchtaigh* was published by MÓINÍN in 2009. It was nominated for the Réics Carló Award for Children's literature; an award she later won for her second book, *Ruball Trioball* published in 2010. In 2011, MÓINÍN published her children's novel *Is Mise do Chara* in 2011, followed by *Cleasaí an Coinín* in 2012.

Having taken a few years break she has recently found herself inspired to return to writing, and so it's an apt time to pose her some questions.

How did you begin writing?

Nuair a thosaigh mé ar an múinteoireacht i meánscoil, bhí mé ag múineadh na Gaeilge i mbunscoil freisin, agus chuir mé an-bhéim ar labhairt na Gaeilge. Thosaigh mé ag scríobh drámaí beaga do na páistí ionas go mbeadh gach rud ó bhéal acu sula dtosódís ar an scríbhneoireacht. Mar sin, bhí mé ag scríobh rudaí beaga. Thart ar 2007 chonaic mé fógra i bhFoinse de cheardlann scríbhneoireachta le Ré Ó Laighléis, agus dúirt mé liom féin gur sheans iontach é seo mo chuid scríbhneoireachta a fheabhsú. Faoin am seo, bhí mise agus m'fhear céile ag tógáil clainne le Gaeilge agus bhí mé ag cumadh scéalta do mo pháistí féin chun a samhlaíocht a spreagadh agus chun cabhrú leo an Ghaeilge a shealbhú. An mhian a bhíodh i gcónaí i mo chroí ná go mbeadh leabhar amháin i gcló agam, ach rinne mé dearmad air toisc go raibh mé gnóthach le cúrsaí an tsaoil. Chonaic mé an fógra céanna i nGael Port, agus dúirt mé liom féin go gcaithfidh mé cur isteach air an gcúrsa sin. Ach, dár

ndóigh, rinne mé dearmad arís eile air. Ach ansin, an tríú huair chonaic mé an fógra i Saol agus dúirt mé liom féin “Now, sin teachtaireacht ó dhuine éigin. Caithfidh mé é a dhéanamh.”

“B'é ag an gceardlann a bhuail mé le Ré Ó Laighléis. Léigh sé cúpla scéal a bhí scríofa agam, agus mhol dom cur isteach ar Scéim na n-Oidí, a n-eagraíonn Foras na Gaeilge le cabhrú le scríbhneoirí. Chuir mé isteach air agus glacadh liom, agus bhí Ré mar oide agam. An duine ab fhearr leis an oiliúint agus an spreagadh ceart a thabhairt dom.

How did you progress from writing for yourself to publishing a book?

Bhí Ré ag iarraidh go mbeadh cnuasach scéalta agam mar an gcéad leabhar. Bhí modh oibre an-deimhnithe i bhfeidhm aige, le spriocdháta an chéad scéal eile a scríobh. Taitníonn córas mar sin liomsa. Bhí sé i dteagmháil ar bhonn rialta liom, ar an bhfón, nó ag bualadh lena chéile chun athbhreithniú agus athchóiriú a dhéanamh. Córas dian a bhí ann, ach thug sé an-spreagadh dom, agus mhúscail sé muinín ionam. Deireadh Ré liom go raibh bua agam, agus chabhraigh sé sin go mór. Thugadh sé comhairle dom: ag rá “níos mó inseoireachta anseo” nó “cuir leis an atmaisféar ansin”. Ach an rud a cabhraigh go mór liom freisin ná mo phaistí féin, mar b'iad na léirmheastóirí ab fhearr. Dá mbeadh scéal scríofa agam léifinn dóibh é agus ba mhinic a stopfadh duine acu mé ag rá “Cad 'tá ar siúl ansin? Táim caillte.” Bheadh orm ansin dul ar ais agus an fhadhb a cheartú. Nó, b'fhéidir ag an deireadh go ndéarfadh duine acu, “Bhuel, tá an deireadh sin uafásach!” agus bheadh ormsa dul agus é a athrú.

Is there a connection between Irish and the wish to write?

Cinnté, ceapaim go bhfuil nasc láidir idir an taobh cruthaitheach ionam agus an Gaeilge. Is múinteoir Béarla mise freisin, ach is fearr liom a bheith ag scríobh trí mheán na Gaeilge. Sin an uair a mhothaím an fuinneamh ionam. Le déanaí anois braithim an fonn scríbhneoireachta ag éirí ionam arís. Má táim in ann an t-am saor a fháil, tá an tarraingt ionam filleadh ar an bpeann.

What's the key inspiration for you to write books?

An aidhm a bhí agam i gcónaí ná go mbeinn ag cur leis na leabhair trí Ghaeilge; leabhair do pháistí óga le saibhreas teanga iontu, agus go mbeidís in ann sult agus taitneamh a bhaint astu. B'fhéidir go mbeidís mar spreagadh dóibh chun leabhair Ghaeilge eile a léamh. Tá an tír ghrá go láidir ionam, cé gur leath-Ostarach mé agus mé an-bhródúil as an taobh eile sin, ach dom féin tá an Gaeilge tar éis an-saibhreas a chur le mo saol agus le mo theaghlaigh. Creidim sa ráiteas úd, tír gan teanga, tír gan anam, agus mar scríbhneoir, creidim sa ráiteas “buanú teanga í a scríobh.”

Beyond these two writers there are numerous other Irish language arts practitioners in the Midlands, though it's hard to do justice to them in the parameters of a single article. There's barely room to mention the phenomenal literary feat of Mullingar-man, Maurice Sinnot (Muiris Sionóid) who has translated all of Shakespeare's sonnets into Irish, in a masterful work titled *Rotha Mór an Ghrá*:

schools entirely through Irish. The Tin Jug Studio in Birr has held some innovative Irish language events this year, including a film festival and a writing competition, while the Tullamore Rhymers collective occasionally feature Irish language poems, but the most unusual Irish language project currently underway is by Eugene McGivern of Athlone's Poetry in the Park collective, who is currently translating the work of the great Indian mystical poet Madan Gopal Gandhi into Irish for a future bilingual publication.

Thus, it is safe to say that despite appearances, there is in fact a rich and dynamic flow of Irish language creativity in the Midlands. It's just not always immediately apparent. Like everything in the Midlands one needs to dig a bit to reveal the finest gems. We are pass-masters at hiding our lights under bushels, ach níor miste dúinn a bheith níos glóraí faoinár suim sna healaíon Gaeilge anseo timpeall. Ní neart go cur le chéile.



Soinéid Shakespeare published by Crigeán Press in 2006. Or Patrick Fagan (Pádraig Ó Fágáin), the great writer and historian from Crookedwood, Co. Westmeath who left us a rich legacy of poems, plays and short stories in Irish upon his death in 2011. Both *Bíonn an Fhírinne Searbh* (1982) and *Fíon an Ghrá agus Drámaí Eile* (1983) are worth rooting out, but the truly ground-breaking work was, *Éigse na hIarmhí* (1985) which celebrates the Irish language poets of Westmeath through the centuries, giving a unique perspective on this region which people associate less with Gaelic culture now.

That said, there are still some really creative enterprises engaging with the Irish language in novel ways, such as the Sean Chistin in Ballyfin, Co Laois, where the irrepressible Maureen Culleton teaches traditional music and dance interwoven with the Irish language, and runs dance classes in

An Irish Art exhibition in Paris, 1922

by Billy Shorthall

Congrès Irlandais à Paris :
[photographie de presse] /
[Agence Rol]. Source: Bibliothèque
nationale de France.



The touring exhibition, 30 Years, Artists, Places, recently seen in the Dunamais Arts Centre and featured in the Summer edition of the Midlands Arts and Culture Magazine threw a spotlight on present-day official support for Irish artists. However, the first engagement the nascent State had with visual art, was a major exhibition of Irish art held in Paris just before the Civil War. In January 1922, as the Irish State was transitioning to independence, its government, as part of a programme to have the State's sovereignty recognised internationally, participated in a World Congress for the Irish Race in Paris.

The Congress was a political gathering attended by an Irish delegation that included three future Irish Presidents (spot them in the photograph below) and diaspora organisations from thirty countries. It was occasioned by a major, month long, Irish art exhibition of three hundred art works. This was the first time the emerging new State used art to position itself internationally. Both Eamon DeValera and Arthur Griffith approved of this display – recognising its value as political propaganda. In conjunction with political independence, the exhibition, an endeavour of cultural diplomacy, was to showcase Irish artistic and cultural uniqueness and independence. George Plunkett, Minister for Fine Art in the revolutionary Dáil during the War of Independence, when the exhibition was being planned, also sought a propaganda value from the show. This was achieved by presenting works that displayed Ireland as a functioning entity, with

political leaders and highlighting British atrocities in Ireland. Among the ninety-four artists and groups represented were, Jack Yeats, John Lavery, Harry Clarke, Albert Power, Sean Keating, Cuala Press and An Tur Gloine. Many of the exhibits are now in Irish national collections. The French government purchased a Paul Henry landscape from the exhibition in Galeries Barbazanges for its collection and it is now in the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris. A number of French archives hold material on the event and these have enabled the recovery of the narrative of this art exhibition, a bold and confident statement by the new state that took place in the art capital of the world. The Liam Swords memorial lectures will present this recent research; 'I know its value for propaganda – a major Irish art exhibition in Paris, 1922' will be held in the Centre Culturel Irlandais, Paris in November and in the Royal Irish Academy, Dublin in February, 2018. Further details

on the Liam Swords bursary and lectures is available at <http://www.liamswordsbursary.ie/>.

Originally from near Abbeyleix and after a career in Information Technology, Billy Shorthall is now an art historian. Receiving the Liam Swords bursary enabled him to spend this summer in the Centre Culturel Irlandais, Paris researching a major Irish art exhibition, held there in 1922.

Billy Shorthall will deliver a talk on the 22 February 2018 in the Midland Park Hotel, Portlaoise as part of the Laois Heritage Society lecture series in association with the Laois Arts Office



A Recyclable Jungle:

Longford town to become an urban forest for Cruthú 2018

There's plenty of woodland in Longford as it is, but next summer, some of the county's creatives will be turning Longford town into an urban forest using recycled materials to build beautiful, artistic trees.



The trees will bring a burst of colour to the town during next year's Cruthú Arts Festival and there will be a prize of €1,000 and two runner-up prizes of €250 for the community groups that create the most original, imaginative and environmentally friendly trees.

The beautifully creative trees located throughout the town will greatly add to the festival atmosphere for the duration of Cruthú Arts Festival. It will create a talking point for people and will help to bring art out into the street and closer to people. It will also be a tremendous promotional exercise for the participating groups and is sure to be an enjoyable bonding experience for the teams of volunteers participating.

The trees will be located at prominent strategic locations throughout the town for the week of the festival, such as the Cathedral, in front of the Temperance Hall, Centenary Square, the Market Square, on the site of the old swimming pool, at the top and bottom of Battery Road, in front of

the Army Barracks and around the railway station, thus guaranteeing maximum visibility.

Longford Arts Office are looking for local groups to get involved in the making of these trees, whether it be a school or a community group. The Arts Office will then engage an artist experienced in these projects to work with the groups on a regular basis, so if you've never made a tree from recyclable material before, you'll learn all you need to know.

The artists will initially visit each participating group to discuss and flesh out a basic concept. Then, once the group has the basic drawings and dimensions of their piece, they will begin to source discarded, recyclable object and begin to build their tree, with regular visits from the artist to offer guidance.

Each participating group will receive visits for representatives of the Tree Council of Ireland and other environmental agencies to talk to them

about trees and related environmental issues, adding educational value to the project. There will also be a Longford Urban Forest writing challenge, inviting local poets and prose writers to submit a piece of literature inspired by an individual tree, which will be matched to the writer via a lottery draw.

All of the trees will then be gathered together to create a forest at the 1916 Commemorative Garden on Great Water Street for an afternoon of literature and music. Participating groups and writers will be photographed beside their respective trees and a book will be published with photographs and literature, to be launched in Autumn 2018.

So next summer, if you feel like taking a stroll through the woods, be sure to take a trip to Longford's own Urban Forest and see the creativity the town has to offer.



Tionól

Music Generation Laois 2nd annual Tionól – Festival included a hugely impressive programme for a national gathering for harps and pipes, in Portlaoise from the 3-5 of November.

Over 150 harpists and pipers, both professional musicians and young people, descended upon Portlaoise to attend workshops, sessions and performances, uilleann pipe reed –making and maintenance sessions, and the exciting premiere of a new musical work commissioned by Music Generation Laois.

On Friday the 3 of November the Opening Gala Concert was held at Portlaoise Further Education and Training Centre at 7pm, featuring the premiere of renowned musician Michael Rooney's new suite of music for harp orchestra, funded through the Creative Ireland Laois Programme. Also performing on the Friday night concert were Music Generation Laois Trad Orchestra, and professional musicians Catriona McKay, Siobhan Buckley, Michael Rooney, June McCormack, Grainne Hambly, Billy Jackson, Kerri Mullan, Deirdre Ní Bhuachalla, Ramune Sakalauskaitė, Paul Harrigan, Padraig McGovern, and Timothy Doyle.

On Saturday the 4th of November, in the Dunamais Arts Centre, harp ensembles and young pipers joined David Power (pipes) and acclaimed Laois Harpist Triona Marshall for a celebratory concert showcasing visiting young musicians from Donegal, Louth, Mayo, Wicklow and Sligo. This concert also featured many young musicians from the Music Generation Laois harp and pipes classes. The weekend culminated with a student concert at 2pm on Sunday 5th of November in Portlaoise Further Education and Training.

Workshops took place throughout the weekend with some of Ireland and Scotland's best musicians.

Speaking about the programme Rosa Flannery Co-ordinator of Music Generation Laois said, "we are thrilled with the success of the weekend of harping and piping in Laois. The ground breaking development in the playing of pipes and harp in Laois is something we are very proud of, Laois is now on the map as a centre of excellence in two instruments of great cultural significance to Ireland. Highlights of the weekend for me included the first ever performance by our brand new harp orchestra in Portlaoise Further Education and Training Centre."

Music Generation Laois is part of Music Generation, Ireland's national performance music education programme, funded by the Department of Education and Skills, U2 and The Ireland Funds and locally by Laois County Council (lead partner), Offaly County Council, Laois Offaly Education and Training Board and Laois Partnership Company. Tionól 2017 is supported by the Music Generation National Projects Fund and the Trench Trust.

See musicgenerationlaois.ie for further details.

A HOLEY PLACE

'Places of Holes' is a site-specific project exploring the histories of Offaly's bogs. A chance meeting in Leeds between Pullough Heritage Group member Caitriona Devery and London based American artist Rachael Champion led to a conversation about the bog. One of Rachael's artistic interests is in how we interact with our natural environment, so they decided to try to make a project happen in Offaly.

Rachael's work is mainly sculpture and installation, so for the Creative Ireland community project funding they proposed a site-specific installation about the natural, social, and industrial history of the bog in County Offaly. We are entering a new phase in its management, moving from industrial use for energy into a conservation phase. The name is inspired by the literal translation of Pullough as gaeilge: "Pollach" (holes).

Rachael came to Pullough in August and worked with the heritage group to collect community memories and traditional understandings of the bog from locals. She met with scientific and

industrial experts from Bord na Mona, Lough Boora, ESB Power Station, geologist John Feehan and visited many industrial sites. She explored the beautiful and biodiverse bogs and wetlands in the area. She continued her research in London, working in the British Library and speaking to environmental experts and artists by email.

The art installation in Turraun will address conservation and climate change in the regenerated peatlands today. Entitled 'Carbon Flux', it consists of a series of sculptures inspired by the chamber-system method of manually collecting greenhouse gas emission data. The

official launch of the artwork is an event called 'Bog Cultures' on Saturday 11 November, 12:00–3:00pm at Pullough National School. It will address climate science, conservation and contemporary art in the bog.

There will be refreshments after the talk and at 3pm a trip to Turraun to see the installation.

There is a Facebook Page for 'Places of Holes' project and on there an event page for the 'Bog Cultures' event. Email caitrionadevery@hotmail.com for information.





Embracing the Arts at the Backstage Theatre, Longford

HOW TO FLATTEN A MOUNTAIN

Exhibition Wed 8 November

This November, photographic artist Alisha Doody launches her latest collection 'How to Flatten a Mountain' in Backstage Theatre's Atrium Gallery.

Her latest exhibition, 'How to Flatten a Mountain' is a reflection of human interaction with the landscape. Through movement in nature and space, the impact of this relationship is explored and made visible in the details. 'How to Flatten a Mountain' was first created during a residency of the same name in Cow House Studios, Wexford. 'How To Flatten a Mountain' opens in the Atrium Gallery, Backstage Theatre Longford on Wednesday 8 November at 8pm. Open to all.

EVE'S GARDEN - STORIES FROM THE WILD

Eibhlín Crossan's latest exhibition 'Eve's Garden - Stories from the Wild' was a huge hit with local art-lovers when it was on display in the Atrium Gallery in Backstage Theatre Longford in September. The exhibition represents a body of work she has created over the last year inspired by nature and in response to her environment.

The title of this exhibition - 'Eve's Garden: Stories from the Wild', brings together the themes of the garden and the goddess.

The Longford-based contemporary artist has rediscovered her passion to create over the last number of years. Working predominantly with acrylic paint and inks, both on canvas and paper, she explores a range of subjects from abstracted botanicals and soft landscapes, to portraits and

abstracts. The natural world that surrounds the garden and woodlands behind her home provide a rich source of inspiration for her work.

The Goddess series celebrates the sacred feminine as symbolic of mother nature. Just as woman gives birth, so too does the earth give birth to the flowers and plants. The personification of this energy that gives birth to and nourishes form is properly female. The Celts honoured goddesses of nature and natural forces, with diverse qualities such as abundance, creation and beauty, as well as harshness and vengeance.

In the Garden series, she has explored both Canopy and Wildflower themes. Abstracting her experience of being immersed in nature, of walking through the woods, or sitting in the garden, under the trees, beneath the canopy of leaves. She has borrowed from shapes and shadows of the flowers and leaves and used the negative spaces to create composition. The soft lines and layers of rich colours create a sense of reflected light and evoke the sensuality and beauty of the organic world.

THREE THOUGHTS ONE BREATH

'Three Thoughts, One Breath' is a very unique exhibition which graced the walls of the Atrium Gallery in early September, showcasing work by three local portrait artists - Shelley Corcoran, Phil Atkinson and Angelika Florkiewicz.

"The exhibition originally came about with the idea of three artists using three different mediums depicting one subject, hence the name 'Three Thoughts, One Breath'," Shelley explained.

"Our admiration for each other's work drove us to combine our individual skills and, because we are all portrait artists, we wanted to choose the portrait of where we live, Longford, and its people."

The three styles used in the exhibition are unique to the artist. Shelley herself uses photography to express her psychoanalytical concept of the subject. Phil looks at life after humans, and how the earth claims back what humans have destroyed.

And Angelika aims to bring happiness to those who look upon her work, so she has created art in a comic book style, "because all comics that I read have a happy ending", she says.

The three artists differ greatly, both in the media through which they choose to express themselves, and in the concepts the use in that expression. They didn't physically work together for this exhibition, but selected the singular theme of the people of Longford to bind the exhibition.

The results were beautiful, with images depicting the people of Longford in very unique and interesting ways. And, with the success of 'Three Thoughts, One Breath', this autumn, the artists are bound to work together again.

"With the response we received from everyone in attendance, we feel it was a huge success and would love to collaborate again," Shelley concluded.

See www.backstage.ie for more information on the Atrium Gallery.



Are the Culturally Curious set to be the discoverers of Westmeath's untapped potential?



Westmeath's new Tourism Officer Una Norris describes the culturally rich landscape of the midlands and looks at some of the 'untapped potential' that will be at the centre of Westmeath's Tourism strategies.

Extensive research undertaken by Fáilte Ireland tells us that a key tourism market for Ireland is the 'Culturally Curious'. These visitors choose their holiday destinations carefully and are independent 'active sightseers' who want to visit new places and get off the beaten track. They want to expand their holiday experience by exploring landscapes, history and culture, talk to the locals and really 'get under the skin' of a place. Where better to provide for this market than our under-explored midlands, where there is an abundance of opportunity to become immersed in culture and heritage.

Westmeath's new County Tourism Strategy recognises this potential, with culture, heritage and festivals to showcase our attractions high on the agenda for tourism development. The county is part of Ireland's Ancient East, Fáilte Ireland's umbrella brand for the region, which aims to make this region the most personally engaging cultural destination in Europe. To achieve this we have

been tasked with harnessing the authentic character of the 'real' Ireland, its living culture, lush landscapes and hidden history. The brand promises visitors engaging stories told by the best storytellers in the world and our attractions are already developing new and innovative ways to tell those stories.

Athlone Castle, part of Athlone's 'Cultural Quarter' and the 'Destination Athlone' tourism movement are offering visitors an immersive and interactive journey through history, with swords, cannon balls and stunning sculptures there to give the ancient stories depth. Close-by, the Hill of Uisneach, Ireland's mythological and sacred centre has a new visitor centre from which guided tours are provided, of the ancient ceremonial site. And once a year, the Bealtaine Fire Festival on the historic hilltop brings the legends and majesty of Uisneach to life. A celebration of Irish culture, art and heritage and Ireland's oldest festival, this magical

event has been held almost every May for over 1,400 years. Culminating in an incredible night parade and fire ceremony, it ignites the summer gathering season in spectacular fashion.

Nevertheless, the potential of Westmeath to cater for the 'culturally curious' tourism market is largely untapped. Mullingar and its hinterland has been identified as an area steeped in 'music, myths and legends', but we still need to find ways to engage our visitors in these stories. Belvedere and its 'Jealous Wall', Fore Abbey, the Children of Lir and Joe Dolan musical legacy are just some of the stories that could add enormous depth to the Ireland's Ancient East brand promise. The real challenge for tourism is to bring this cultural heritage to life through multi-day visitor experiences that will bring international tourists and generate an impact relative to the potential.

Laois and Offaly County Councils, with the support of Creative Ireland, commissioned two musicians to explore and present aspects of the pollinators of Ireland through their art form.

pollinators

The two successful applicants were Ian Wilson who was commissioned by Co Laois and Karen Power who was commissioned by Co Offaly. The results were two very different works and an exciting response to the theme of pollination.

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The two successful applicants were Ian Wilson who was commissioned by Co Laois and Karen Power who was commissioned by Co Offaly. The results were two very different works and an exciting response to the theme of pollination. *THRESHOLDS*, was premiered at the Leaves Festival of Writing and Music in Emo Court.

'Sonic Pollinators' composed by Karen Power will be performed by Karen and the Quiet Music Ensemble at 7.45pm Tuesday 5th December, at the Tullamore Arts Centre venue, High St, Tullamore. The concert is FREE, but pre-booking advised to CreativeCulture@Offalycoco.ie

Both pieces will be performed together at Dunamais Art Centre, Portlaoise and Birr Theatre & Arts Centre on a date to be confirmed in Spring 2018. See venue and arts office social media, websites and local press for details. www.dunamais.ie www.birrtheatre.com

Sweet Sounds of Pollination

Protecting our country's pollinators has never been so important. Laois's creative approach to the issue can be seen (and heard) in the coming months.

There's nothing nicer than sitting out in the sun, lazily watching bees and butterflies flit between bright petals and long grass.

But this spectacle isn't just for show. It's a crucial part of our country's biodiversity. We have 98 species of bees in Ireland and they all do their part to pollinate our gardens and crops. They're crucial for sustaining our ecosystem, not to mention our economy, and almost all of our bee species are under serious threat.

With the help of Creative Ireland, County Laois is taking a creative approach to highlighting the importance and value of pollinators. Composer Ian Wilson is creating a specially commissioned piece entitled *Thresholds*, for County Laois. Featuring local voices and the sounds of the pollinators themselves, the work is inspired by the natural beauty of the county. The full piece was premiered in Emo Court as part of the Leaves Writing and Music Festival. It was performed by saxophonist Cathal Roche.

The piece has taken inspiration from the work of the National Biodiversity Data Centre to protect pollinators through the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan, which has also inspired other pollinator actions throughout Co Laois including the Portlaoise Pollinator Party during heritage week which saw artists and ecologists working together to celebrate bees and butterflies in Portlaoise Town's Green Flag Park.



sonic pollinators

'Listen to a place and it will remain with you much longer and clearer than if you've only looked.' - Karen Power

sonic pollinators (2017) is a musical composition project developed in response to the Offaly/Laois County Council call for art works based around pollination, but perhaps more than that it's a project that I've been wanting to create for quite some time, but was waiting for the right support structures to fully achieve. This extraordinary opportunity continues to unveil new sounds, collaborations and partnerships allowing a truly living musical work to unfold in realtime, which just like it's subject matter continually contributes to new life...

I wear many hats as a composer, and as an electroacoustic composer I specialise in using environmental and every day sounds as source material for my musical compositions. When I am listening/recording in any location it is not alone the sound that is of influence in the resulting piece

of music, but also its context, its natural flow, its less obvious relationship with other connecting sounds and its realtime relevance within that specific place. I believe that very place has its own character (sonic signature) and sense of time - this for me is palpable - most especially in more isolated, less human spaces. Just listen to any space where nature and animal are left to simply coexist. They are in sync and everything within that space has a purpose, a kind of natural chaos? You hear patterns evolve and dissolve as things move around the space and a new kind of 'harmony' floats within. Why is this not considered musical?

This practice has taken me to some of the world's most remote places, from The High Arctic - to record above, inside and deep below the ice within the illusion of a surface silence - to The Amazon Rainforest - to record the flow of animal and plant

life beyond human interaction/interference - and to many more extraordinary locations. Such places offer us a sense of the natural flow of our world, which I then pair with musicians, who come with their own individual and often learned sense of time, harmony and rhythm, which exists within any musical structure. Pairing our natural world with our humanly shaped one has led to my development of new methods of communication between trained musicians and nature. So, I have been developing a new type of 'score' for musicians, which I call *aural scores*, as they are heard not read. The details vary depending on the individual performer, but the important difference is that most notation is replaced by sound. Together, I hope, musicians and nature conjure new and re-imagined musical spaces that we: composer, performer and audience, can all share together.



Stephen James Smith is First Laois Spoken Word Resident

A new spoken word resident has been appointed for county Laois as part of an exciting and creative new project.

Dunamais Arts Centre and Laois Arts Office, with the support of the Arts Council and Creative Ireland are introducing Stephen James Smith from Tallaght, Co. Dublin as the new Spoken word Resident for Laois.

Stephen is one of the most well-known modern day poets in Ireland and he has big plans for Laois. His work encompasses the spoken word through poetry and the new digital era of communication.

Inspired by the theatre from a young age, James has written a play which toured Ireland, parts of the UK and France. He is well known across the open mic performances nights around Dublin for his poetry, creativity and bringing people together through these kind of events.

"I am a poet, playwright and I curate events and I do a lot of work with kids which is tied in with this residency. I sort of fell into poetry. I did mechanical engineering when I first left school, I dropped out of that as I was sick, I started writing songs around 16 years old, I was playing a bit of guitar and when I was 20, I started writing poems but I didn't think I would end up doing this full-time.

"It is a surprise for me as well but I kept on writing away, I heard about an open mic night and went on to that and it just opened my eyes up to poetry and this scene that I hadn't really been part of before, I got to make friends there and was encouraged that helped me to develop a bit more and I got more gigs and got to travel with it then," he said.

Stephen is most famous for two poems in particular. One is called "Dublin You Are" which he wrote for the city's Capital of Culture bid and another called

"My Ireland" which he was commissioned to write for the St. Patrick's festival. His work has reached 700,000 viewers on YouTube with over 1 million online views in total and Stephen has become a sensation in the world of 21st century poetry.

What is "Spoken Word"?

Despite believing that "poetry is a hard sell", Stephen is passionate about the art, getting to know Laois and encouraging an appreciation for the spoken in people of all ages in the county and beyond.

"Ultimately spoken word it is sort of a hard sell but I find in general people actually engage with it. The might not seek it out but if it happens they engage and like it," he said.

Stephen hopes to perform gigs in local pubs in the lead up to hopefully hosting a huge showcase at the Dunamais Arts Centre of the best of Irish spoken word encompassing poetry and music. "It demystifies it a little bit and takes away the stereotypes."

What does it mean for Laois?

Stephen's ambition stretches far beyond engaging with youth groups in Laois. He hopes to get involved

With local Men's Sheds, walking groups, knitting groups and any other groups that would be interested in expression through poetry. The IATD graduate has also requested to run workshops in Portlaoise Prison. It is his goal to leave behind a self-sustaining poetry group in Laois run by local members.

Portlaoise Connection

A chance encounter with musician Glen Hansard in a hotel in Portlaoise launched Stephen's career to new heights two years ago. Since then he has travelled around the UK, Europe, Asia and this year went to L.A. with Glen performing poetry live as a support act.

"It was just up the road here I was going to see Mick Flannery and Gary Dunne was supporting him. I went into the hotel next door to get a bite to eat and Glen Hansard was sitting there and he had retweeted the poem. I was passing by and said thanks to him but I wanted to leave him to his meal. I sat down for a bite to eat before the gig, he came over to me before he was heading off and he asked me what I do. He said would you come and do the poem with me in Vicar Street in a week or two so I said yeah and gave him my card. I didn't hear anything from him, I thought that's life but I woke up the next morning and I had an email at 5 or 6 in the morning he had found my card in his jacket pocket and he asked me to come along that night so I did. Thankfully it went well," he explained.

What does this mean to him?

Stephen is enthusiastic, ambitious, passionate and driven when it comes to poetry and this residency has offered him stability.

"I get to see interesting things and I am not stuck in an office which I have done before and I can't cope with that but it is a handy getting this residency because it essentially means I can afford to feed myself next year."

sonic pollinators asked for a completely different kind of listening from that of the Arctic to the rainforest, one that must exist within human-populated environments and all that that entails. Therefore, *sonic pollinators'* main concept centres around a kind of nature versus nurture idea, in which I listen/record pollinators in their natural environments and those bred and housed within apiaries.

I have been fortunate enough to spend the last 4 months listening in many different locations around Offaly and selectively recording within each location. Every location is unique and ephemeral, as it is alive and constantly changing. My field recordings are creative snapshots, which then become source material for my compositional practice. However, I believe that this practice begins with the act of listening, preparing

and then making the recording. These snapshots carry with them my unique experience in making them, my memory of how it felt to be in the middle of a natural meadow, alone, sun streaming on my face, waiting, being simultaneously part of and outside of the natural act of pollination. Perhaps it's best described as eaves-dropping on our wondrous world and translating all of those senses of feel, sight, sound and smell into a composed musical composition. How is this possible? A question I often ask. But I'm not ever trying to recreate my own personal experience within the resulting work, more seeking to translate the essence of it through sound and music. For example, when listening to *sonic pollinators*, I am far less interested in whether you hear a bee and more interested in where that sound uniquely takes you. Is it a bee? Is it music? Is it part of a sonic journey that will temporarily take you elsewhere?

sonic pollinators will engulf you, surround you, like a protective cocoon; something like I felt while making some of these recordings. I very much look forward to sharing this with you through its premier on October 17th, 2017. For this premier performance I am delighted to team up once again with the extraordinary group Quiet Music Ensemble (www.quietmusicensemble.com), Ireland's only experimental ensemble. QME will employ their unique skills as improvisers, listeners + interpreters as they shift between notated, graphic and aural materials to create musical dialogues that seamlessly meander between music and nature's pollinators.

I invite you to come, listen and re-hear your own every day environment as something that can move beyond mere functionality.

PurpleOnion

An artistic gem in a rural village

If you take a trip to any of the larger towns and cities around the country, you'll find no end to the number of quirky, unique restaurants you can choose from. But when you find something quirky in the more rural parts of the country, it's a lot more special.

The Purple Onion in Tarmonbarry is one such rural gem. Opened in 2003 as a bar/restaurant, the Purple Onion has since added a beautiful art gallery, providing a very unique dining experience. "Pauline [Roe] and myself are both chefs and thankfully business, while at times difficult, has largely been good, which allows us to stay moderately, rather than largely in debt," quipped Paul Dempsey who is a real art-lover and thought displaying art would be a fantastic way to make the business stand out.

"I always collected a few small pieces but, unfortunately, Pauline started insisting that the 'mortgage needed to be paid and the children could really do with shoes and clothes and food and that perhaps buying another painting was not exactly urgent'. Sometimes Pauline's priorities can be hard for me to understand," Paul joked. "So, I asked Pauline, 'could I start dealing in art and if there is any profit can I buy something then?' She replied, more or less 'yes'. A highly skeptical 'yes' and one she has regretted many times."

There was a group of bedrooms above the pub that had been used for accommodation and a bed and breakfast which the pair converted into a gallery space in May 2006, with the first group exhibition opening two weeks later.

"The space is too small, the ceiling is too low and the lighting isn't great but, despite this, we have had many wonderful exhibitions in the intervening years, including one man shows by Padraig Lynch, Graham Knuttel, Michael McCarthy, Judy Hamilton, Mary Reynolds, Kenneth Webb among others," said Paul.

"Up to recently we exhibited mostly paintings and sculptures but, this year, we held an exhibition of photography - a medium which we will continue to explore. We have also had quite a few group shows and, believe me, when you get a group of artists together... well, best not go there, it can be interesting." Very early on Paul and Pauline decided that they would only

display what they liked, but they were not going to be constrained by any one discipline so you'll often find a traditional landscape right beside a more modernist piece.

"We also hang lots of artwork in the bar, which is, in reality, a restaurant in a bar setting. Again, we try to hang work of quality. I want to hang some nudes and edgier work in the bar but once again spoilsport Pauline won't let me, she thinks about some people's sensibilities, sometimes she is no fun," Paul jokes. "People can react very strongly to a particular piece and sometimes if it is moved or sold (wohoo!) they ask about it, sometimes missing it."

"I also have a theory that most people can just about stand to be in each other's company so, until the pre-dinner drinks have kicked in or their hunger has been abated and they can at last be civil with each other, they need a distraction. Lots of doctor's waiting rooms have a fish tank that seems to relax people, but I had a goldfish once and I hated cleaning the tank so art serves our purpose."

Paul also reckons the Purple Onion is saving lives and relationships by displaying art: "There may be a couple in for a meal and while the lady may be looking at him she may be thinking, 'I hope he has soup, then I can push his ugly face into it and maybe drown him'. Then she starts looking around and notices the artwork, starts admiring it, finds herself connecting with a piece and decides that everything isn't so bad after all and perhaps letting the barely house trained gorilla live a little longer is not such a bad idea."

"You see art is vital; I don't know if we will ever get a Presidential award for our services, but we do it anyway."

For more information, visit www.purpleonion.ie.



MUSIC ACROSS THE MERSEY

In her 13th book, *Music Across the Mersey*, (published in November), Geraldine O'Neill continues to highlight the Irish emigrants who crossed the sea to begin new lives in Britain or America.

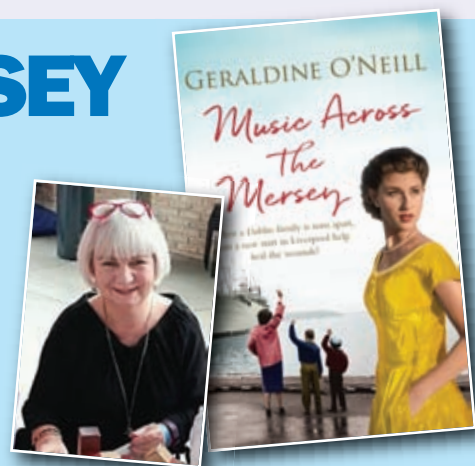
New characters, settings and storylines emerge with every book, but there is one constant - the role of County Offaly. The Offaly backdrop in Geraldine's books is authentic and familiar to both local readers and thousands of fans across the globe.

Her latest book, *Music Across The Mersey*, starts off in Dublin in the 1940's, and tells the story of the amiable, but irresponsible Johnny Cassidy and his family. Whilst Ireland is still in a state of Emergency towards the end of World War II, and everyone is struggling with the effects of rationing and financial hardship, the Cassidy's are suffering their own fall-out.

Recently widowed, Johnny is unemployed and struggling to care for his four children. He seeks

comfort in drink, but when a serious accident occurs he is advised to find a woman to manage the household, or the children will be sent to an orphanage. With his brothers and families in war-ravaged Liverpool, Johnny turns to his last resort - his wife's odd, spinster cousin from Tullamore.

Nora Lamb is reluctant when Johnny Cassidy seeks help, and fearful about leaving home and work for the dangerous streets of Dublin. Although lonely, Nora is apprehensive about living with the Cassidy children in their chaotic household. Living with the kind and handsome Johnny is a different matter. With Nora in charge of the younger two, Ella Cassidy can be a teenager again, while her temperamental older brother, Sean, finds music his salvation. A New Year brings with it an exciting offer



for Sean Cassidy - as a solo singer and pianist - in one of the big Liverpool hotels. Johnny decides to accompany him, taking his chance to escape Nora's growing affections for him.

Then, fate strikes at the heart of the Cassidy family again - threatening to split the family apart. In the aftermath, can they all pull together, and find the strength once more to start again?

Arts Ability Programme at the Dean Crowe Theatre

Gets the Thumbs Up from Adult Services in the region

As the Dean Crowe Theatre enhances its outreach programme with the addition of a new Creative Ireland funded project, levels of interest in the programme are soaring.

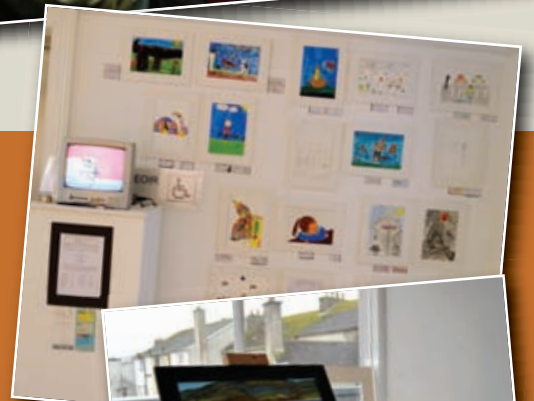
The pilot for this project was launched on Culture Night with over 200 people attending including the Westmeath Arts Officer Miriam Mulrennan, Senator Gabrielle Mc Fadden, Kevin Boxer Moran TD and the Lord Mayor Aengus O'Rourke.

Gayle Tarmey of the Dean Crowe Theatre management team explains "we are delighted to see the programme receive such a fantastic subscription, and also to see the participants benefit from access to and engagement within the arts community. The talent within the group is astonishing and it is thoroughly enjoyable watching the show 'One Tribe' materialise as a result of the commitment and participation of all involved. We would really love to see this programme replicated in every county in Ireland over the lifespan of the Creative Ireland Programme 2017-2022. Like any pilot programme there is an element of the unknown, however the commitment of the volunteers and support within the community has far exceeded expectations and we are confident that key stakeholders attending the final presentation in December will support the replication and continuation of the project".

On the 8th & 9th of December this year 2017, The Dean Crowe Theatre will host two nights of entertainment presented by members from the adult services of St. Hilda's and Rehab Care Athlone. Seventy three participants worked collaboratively to get this project off the ground, these included participants from St. Hilda's Services, Rehab Care Services, The Dean Crowe Theatre, Tonnta Theatre, and Attitude Dance Academy. With the support of Creative Ireland Westmeath, the Arts ability programme grew from having

21 expressions of interest to 73 active participants. Over a period of 12 weeks, participants will enjoy workshops in arts and craft, costume design, speech and drama, music, song and dance before presenting One Tribe the show on the 8th & 9th December. **Tickets for One Tribe are available from or by calling 09064 92129 Priced €12 & €15**

Lord Mayor of Athlone Aengus O'Rourke congratulations a member of the One Tribe Team on a fantastic performance



Caroline Keane

A Laois based artist originally from Portlaoise, Caroline Keane completed her Bachelor Honours Degree in Fine Art at the Limerick School Of Art and Design. During a residency at the Art House in Stradbally, she began creating and building her dynamic format of 'Art Classes with Caroline Keane'.

Caroline is interested in creating an accessible platform for people to engage in art and art making. "I want to provide a space where I can share the joy that art making has to offer. In tough economic times the arts can be over looked, but it has so much to offer then we may realise", explains the artist.

Art classes with Caroline Keane have been running in the Dunamais Arts Centre since 2015, these classes include Adult Art for beginners, an After School Art club for budding artists, a toddler & parent art session and Art Birthday Parties for all ages! The art sessions have been received with a warm reception and continue to grow and expand. The artist credits an essential ingredient to bringing creative ideas like this alive, the support system of local art centres like the The Dunamais Arts Centre.

In the short seasons of classes the groups have exhibited twice, at the Dunamais Arts Centre for culture night of 2016 and at the Mountmellick Library Gallery during the spring of 2017. The exhibition 'Art classes with Caroline Keane

presents *Duality*' at the Mountmellick Library Gallery was the students' first large scale show. The artists in show included children from the After School Art Club and the brave beginners of the Adult Art classes. The group show represented inspirations from nature and the everyday. A variety of mediums were explored such as pencil acrylic, watercolour and pastels to stop motion animation. Caroline shares: "As the classes continue, I watch how people's confidence grows and how both the adults and kids obtain a sense of solicitude and freedom to be imaginative. It is a joy to observe."

One of the great aspects of the *Duality* exhibition was to see all the children's art work in the mix with the adults in a formal gallery aesthetic, providing a wonderful chance for the children to share their art with a wider audience. Another great accomplishment was seen in a painting and book displayed side by side at the show. A watercolour painting created by Barbara Connolly in the classes has become a beautiful book cover of a newly released book written by the author

Eliza White Buffalo. An incredible achievement for an amateur artist.

It seems like this is only the beginning of what this artist wishes to achieve with this platform of art classes. "I feel extremely lucky to work and engage with so many different people. As I introduce them to the wonderful world of art making in turn each week they inspire the world of my art practice."

For more information on Art Classes with Caroline Keane new season of classes check out: **Facebook @: Art Classes with Caroline**

Website: artclasseswithcarolinekeane.com
www.dunamais.ie



Westmeath

continues to deliver a high impact, culturally diverse programme across the county on

Culture Night 2017

This is the thirteenth year for Culture Night nationally and building on the success of previous years there were over 40 events throughout the county, all of them free for audiences to attend. Westmeath's wealth of talent and cultural diversity was expressed across multiple art forms - from art and music, to dance and theatre performances.

There were visual arts exhibitions in Abbey Road Studios, Athlone, Luan Gallery, Athlone Art Group, Shambles Art Studio – each providing the opportunity for audiences to meet with the art makers or participate in workshops. Children's art was the focus in Mullingar with Helium delivering an innovative art workshop, 'Winging it' exhibition popping up in Market House, and Little Art workshop engaging our younger artists in Tyrrellspass.

Among the new elements of the programme this year was an impressive range of activities in Castlepollard – including a writing competition,

art exhibition, set dance performances, local taekwondo demo, and Open Mic of poetry and storytelling organised by the local writers group called 'Write here, Write now'.

Poetry and storytelling captivated audiences in Athlone, Ballynacargy, Mullingar and Castlepollard. An impressive breadth of music and dance performances took place all across the county, among them – Athlone Youth Orchestra, The Athlone Pipe Band, The Army Band, Mullingar Town Band and dance performances by Energy Plus School of Dance. Mullingar Student Players presented an Agatha Christie play entitled

'And Then There Were None' in Mullingar Art Centre, with the Dean Crowe, Athlone launching its Autumn programme and providing a snapshot of its new Arts Ability Programme in collaboration with St Hildas. Teach Ceoil in Ballynacargy and Aras an Mhuilinn in Mullingar provided evenings of music, song and dance.

Westmeath Arts Office extends sincere gratitude to all who participated in making Culture Night in Westmeath such a success and in particular to the audiences who attended all the many events. A great programme is only as strong as the audience who embrace it.

Longford Arts Centre

A REAL POSSIBILITY

Longford County Council's plan to develop a Creative Hub Space in Longford Town could have very positive implications for the arts sector in the county. Confirmation in recent weeks that the Local Authority had acquired the iconic building on Main Street universally known as Providers has opened up the real possibility that a permanent home for the Arts community might be incorporated in the plans.

The notion of a prominent gallery space in the heart of Longford Town has excited the different local arts groups. The Providers building has hosted a number of temporary exhibitions in recent years and though it was built in the 1960s as a furniture store, it was inadvertently perfectly appointed and laid out as an arts exhibition space. It is located in the centre of town, it has extensive wall space on three floors and it has walls of glass on two sides providing the kind of natural light a painter or curator would only dream of having.

The Council's overarching goal is to create a dynamic space where fledgling entrepreneurs in the digital economy can mix freely with people from the arts in an environment that stimulates creative thinking. It supports the principles of STEAM where authorities recognise the value of the Arts in fostering innovation and introducing lateral thinking across the different business disciplines.

Of course many hurdles have to be crossed before the centre is fit for purpose and much will depend on the centre management's ability to raise the necessary funds to develop the building to the required standard.

According to Longford County Council's Arts Officer, Fergus Kennedy, Longford is one of the few counties in Ireland that doesn't have a dedicated arts centre and exhibition space.

"This new and very welcome development will be the final block in the architecture of Longford arts infrastructure and will be an invaluable aide in increasing the professionalism of Longford arts and crafts. It will also provide a valuable opportunity to enable the creative sector to monetise its value to the local community and generate a creative revenue stream for the local economy," he said.

These sentiments were echoed by Shane Crossan, Chairman of Engage Artists' Group and Cruthú Arts Festival who said: "This new facility will, when completed, provide a sorely needed platform for the many talented artists in the Longford area. It will represent the single biggest addition to the arts infrastructure of Longford since the opening of the Backstage Theatre and Centre for the Arts almost 26 years ago."

In the meantime the creative community of Longford holds its breath that the remaining funding will be forthcoming to enable Longford County Council to provide the kind of creative facilities the community deserves.



Four Young Artists Laid in a Line

Brave Giant capture the essence of Longford Arts

Longford is very much an artistic county with creatives from all walks of life showcasing their talent via various media. And popular band Brave Giant have captured just how creative Longford can be in their new music video, 'Four'.

"We view every video as a separate entity to the song itself, giving us another opportunity to create something original," said band member Ross McNerney of the new video. "The song 'Four' is no different. It's our first song to get over 100,000 streams on Spotify so we want to give the fans an official video for it."

So they decided to hit the streets of Longford town to create something as uniquely creative as the song itself. "The video was inspired by all the

incredible street artwork around Longford town. Having all grown up together in North Longford and going to school in Moyne Community School, we are obviously very proud of where we come from," Ross explained.

"We also wouldn't be where we are today without all the help and support from the people of Longford. This video for 'Four' will combine our music with the artistic talents of Phil Atkinson to add another mural to the streets of Longford. To find out more and keep up to date with the band, find Brave Giant on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube.

PAUL MOORE

County boundaries don't mean anything to Tullamore photographer Paul Moore. All of the midlands are his canvas (and further afield), but the familiar provided the inspiration for a recent exhibition of his work held in The Pantry in Portlaoise.

The exhibition – his first – was a great success and as a result he has been invited to provide a new series of photographs for a further exhibition in December.

If you missed out in October, make sure to go along in December and take a look at life in the midlands as seen through the lens of a very talented newcomer to this art form.

The mild mannered accountant juggles both sides of his life with great aplomb. He is fortunate that his family provides great support and often feature in his images.

The intrepid Tullamore man has also branched out into training, offering workshops in iPhone photography all around the country. His images are also very popular in the publishing world with numerous photographs now gracing the front cover of books on the international market.





LESSER KNOWN GODS

The cultural landscape of Westmeath is steeped in heroines and deities, with a few rogues along the way. ‘Magical Lugh’ and ‘Gráinne Og’ hold court majestically in Dún na Sí Amenity and Heritage Park. The story of the wilful Gráinne, and her complicated love life is well known. Here we explore some of the background to one of Westmeath’s... lesser known Gods...

Among the many attractions at Dún na Sí Amenity and Heritage Park, is the magnificent sculpture of ‘Lugh’ an Irish God of days gone by. The sculpture is located at the highest point of the heritage park giving him an imposing location from which to survey the area. Created from 4,000 year old bog oak donated by the Robins Family, Ballingarbry, Lugh’s spear is eighteen metres long and has a copper tip. The copper tip of the spear and Lugh’s head were created by Belfast born, Westmeath based sculptor and artist Patsy Preston. Patsy has many associations with the park having worked tirelessly in community and school settings on many of the artistic features of the park as it was in development and since it has opened.

According to Irish mythology during the late Bronze Age and early Iron Age, the popular weapon of choice amongst our Irish ancestors was the spear. Lugh, known as a sun god and a fierce warrior, possessed several magical weapons, including an invincible spear, one of the treasures of the Tuatha Dé Danann who were one of the great ancient tribes of Ireland. Lugh’s father was Cian and his mother Ethniu, daughter of Balor of the Formorians who

were said to be a supernatural race in Irish mythology. It was said that Balor learned that one day he would be murdered by a grandson, of which he had three, so he arranged to have them all killed. Lugh was saved and went on to have many wives and children. His most famous son was Irish war hero Cú Chulainn. One story explains how Lugh travelled to the Hall of Tara to join the court of Nuada, High King of the Tuatha Dé Danann.

However the guard at the door would not grant him access unless he had a skill that was of help to the King. Lugh told him that among many he was a craftsman, swordsman, harpist, poet, historian, sorcerer, physician and champion. The guard quickly told him ‘We already have experts with those skills’, and Lugh then told him, ‘I have all these skills together’, and he was allowed access. Lugh joined the court and led the clan in many adventures and historic battles some of which have historical relevance to the nearby Hill of Uisneach. Today, people remember Lugh with a festival called ‘Lughnasadh’ which commemorates the beginning of the harvest of in August. In fact the Irish name for the month of August is ‘Lúnasa’.

Chairs and Championing

By Ciara Kelly

When trying to define culture, there are a myriad of explanations and examples that could be used depending who you speak to. A word so broad in connotations it is difficult to establish a common understanding other than that in a dictionary or academic research. In talking to Edenderry screenwriter and Culture Night Offaly’s champion Eugene O’Brien about this very word, there is an initial agreement that the word is clearly tricky if even a bit intimidating.

This business of “culture” might be a throwaway magazine supplement to some or a buzzword in modern business practice to others – see *Take Your Dog To Work Day*. Achieving a mutual understanding of the term is no easy feat. It is easy, however, to identify some well documented reasons for a disconnect in participation in arts and culture based activities such as funding or no clearly defined space/hub to gather in, but these obstacles can also inspire lateral thinking.

Earlier in the year a chair made of turf appeared in the middle of Edenderry town much to the curiosity of passers-by. A call to action by artist Louise O’Brien, who also happens to be Eugene’s sister, encouraged local people to get involved in

Cultural Collisions as part of Culture Night 2017. Expressions of “Selfhood, Body and Environments” in stories told through an ordinary item like a chair became the *raison d’être* and through approaching people in street, this simple dialogue is what Eugene describes as what “hooks” people. He mentions that much like a sport or vocation, using mentoring or an “apprenticeship-like” approach to cultural activities helps to unlock a creative facet in the mind.

Using mediums such as technology, which is so deeply embedded into our daily lives, for a cultural experience was a feature of Offaly’s Culture Night. A Virtual Reality experience took place in Tullamore, immersing attendees into a gallery



experience at a Fine Art museum or, for younger participants, the chance to paint virtual brush strokes. Like *Cultural Collisions* it was personal, and turned the ordinary on its head, connecting with those who took part.

Perhaps culture exists not only in broad, shared experiences but also in our own daily routines, as illustrated in the chairs we sit on and the use of our gadgets. With weekly warnings in the news media that globalisation or even isolation is eviscerating culture, the championing of arts activities and the use of new perspectives becomes essential, after all you can’t spell culture without U!



LONGFORD

BUZZING

after first Culture Night

Longford town was buzzing on September 22 as a host of events showcasing the talents of local artists and musicians took place for Culture Night. This was the first year that Culture Night was celebrated in Longford and the organisers decided to go all out and have an entire day of events.

The town itself was a hive of activity as a marquee was erected in association with Spin Longford, displaying a number of arts and crafts stalls, food, music and a variety of sculptures created by schools around county Longford using photographs.

Organiser, Paul Hennessy, had only great things to say about the day: "It went amazingly well. It was a huge success and there was a great buzz around the town for the whole day. It was a busy day, but we pulled it off," he said.

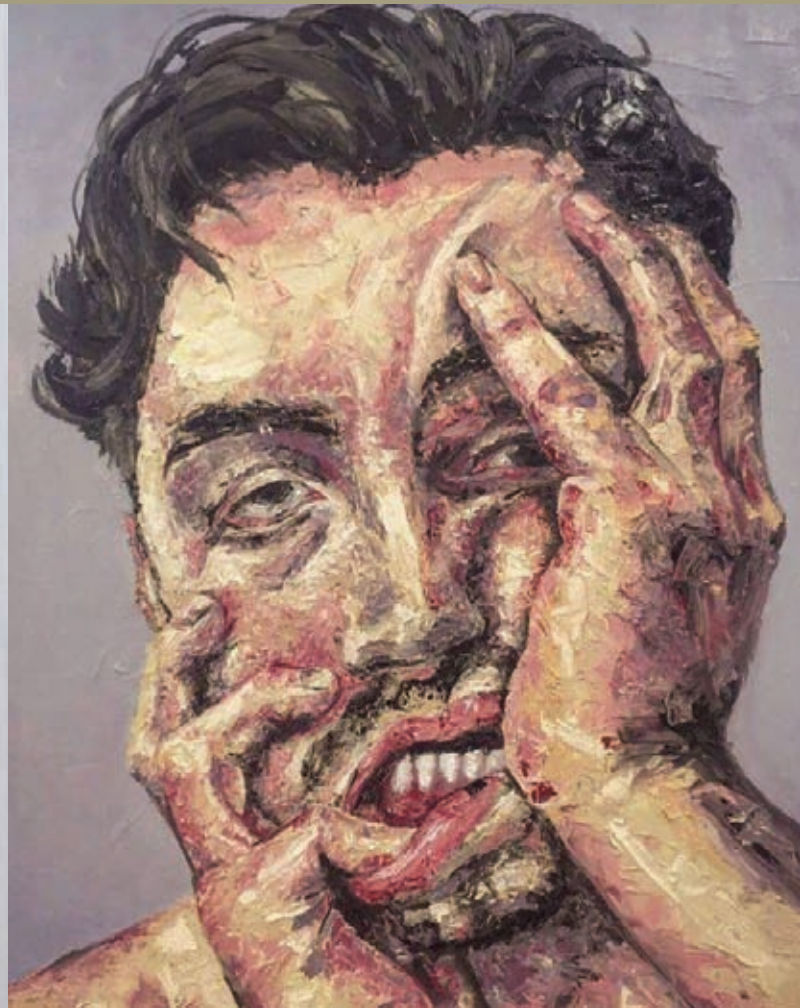
The old Providers building found a new lease of life as the highly popular 'Memory has a Pulse' exhibition was launched, featuring a score of works by artists Gary Reynolds, Thomas Brezing and Seán Cotter.

And, perhaps, the highlight of Culture Night in Longford was the Culture Concert held in the Temperance Hall, featuring 24 different acts and displaying the incredible talent that Longford has to offer.

"The concert was fantastic. You couldn't get in the door, there were so many people. There were 24 different acts and everyone was amazing. No-one knew what was coming next because we didn't release a programme to tell them what to expect. We had everything from Irish dancing to solo performances to choirs. It was fantastic," said Paul.

And, already, the organisers are looking forward to next year's event, when a similar range of events will be held.





Atrium Exhibitions:

Westmeath Arts Officer Miriam Mulrennan chats to visual artist Niall Lynam as he returns to his secondary school (St Joseph's Rochfortbridge) to co-exhibit his work with current students

NIALL'S BACKGROUND

Being from a very rural area, Raharney... I wasn't subjected to a lot of art until I started secondary school, where I was taught by Niamh Sweeney (who kindly asked me back to display at the school's exhibition). I applied to study at Limerick School of Art and Design. Fortunately for me, LSAD has a core year in which you can try out different disciplines of art and design and see which suits you best. Fast forward a few years and I'm a painting graduate living and working in Berlin!

NIALL'S INSPIRATIONS

I am completely inspired by people, I usually take between 20-30 people and combine their features to make this new non-existent character. I never really realised how much Ireland influenced my work until I moved away. I always thought I was creating a non-identity, but really what I was making was a median Irish face. Moving to a new city, the paintings become more and more diverse, which is exciting.

NIALL'S WORK

The large portraits I displayed recently focus on the deconstruction of the portraiture genre (a bit of a mouthful, I know). Basically I would consider them virtual portraits, as they are faces of non-

existent persons. The hope was that in erasing individuality it will also erase any prejudice or pre conceived bias towards the sitter/subject. I wanted to work against the most commonly valued aspect of the genre; must a portrait represent an existing face? When I started out painting I spent a lot of time in the photography studio taking pictures of friends and colleagues, which I would later attempt to paint as accurately as possible. It was around this time that I started to question; why I was making portraits of these people? ...for the sitter to hang in their home ... show to their families? Who else would want it really? The pieces that I'm making now are a more democratic, socially based representation; merely examples of a type of portraiture.

AND BERLIN?

If you know where to look for it, there is an extensive network of creativity in Berlin. And that's beyond the well known galleries, museums and exhibitions... If you're young and creative you will still find it difficult to integrate into the main art scene, but I think Berlin still keeps its reputation as a place to nurture and grow your artistic ability. There is an abundance of off-location art places where people of all walks of life can meet freely in a creative environment and talk with like minded people

CURRENTLY?

After leaving college and developing a concept for almost four years, it's actually quite nice to go back to my roots and focus solely on honing my technical skill! Sketching from landscapes, architecture and everything else Berlin has to offer. I'm looking forward to expanding on my concept and portrait collection.

BUDDING ARTISTS – NIALI'S ADVICE

I would encourage any student who has a love for visual art to pursue it. I'll be honest, it's by no means an easy road, but it is feasible to make a living. The dream is to leave college and immediately become a full time artist. But the financial reality of such a move can make life extremely difficult. In order to make a reasonable living, a lot of recent graduates find themselves juggling a full time job alongside their artistic career, myself included. There are plenty of great opportunities in Ireland like artist residencies, discussions and exhibitions taking place all of the time. And I do believe you make 100% of your own opportunities happen. If you have the passion, then go for it!

Westmeath's musical talent continues to make waves on the international stage

THE ACADEMIC

Mullingar band The Academic need no introduction to Midlands Arts and Culture readers, but their continued rise on an international stage deserves further recognition. In 2017 the band has impressively sold out shows across Europe and supported bands including The Strokes and Noel Gallagher. They are currently on a 25-date US tour and play their only Irish headline show in Vicar Street on November 4, 2017. Their debut LP will release early 2018 and their new fb video is nearing a million hits, where they use Facebook Live's time lag to create a visual loop pedal. Check it out, the effect is incredible. Apparently the band managed this feat by rearranging each instrument on their track 'Bear Claws' to fit the 'fb Live' delay.

The Academic have harnessed the genius combination of creativity and technology, and in adding melodies combined with live projection created a visual feast. Not to be missed.

NIALL HORAN

Soft rock probably best describes Mullingar native Niall Horan's new album. Shades of the country tones that seem to be soaking into our pop offerings these days, see the 24 year old Horan reaching No. 1 on the US Top 40 Radio Chart with 'Slow Hands'. This is a respectable accolade in any musician's career, especially in the post-boy-band-territory. All too often the "we're going to work on some solo projects" mantra, doesn't always meet its initial promise. The ever-modest Horan thanked his fans on hearing the news of the success of 'Slow Hands', and perhaps it is in part this grounded-ness that endears him to audiences, as he navigates the post-Boyband chapter of his career.

Having made admirable inroads in cracking the musical-nirvana that is the US music charts, Horan's successes are watched proudly by his loyal home audiences. His World Tour has been confirmed for 2018 with dates in the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand announced.

STRADBALLY EXHIBITION

Puts Focus on Creativity of Young Laois Artists

The artistic talents of the young people of Co. Laois, and the contribution they have made towards the success of the Texaco Children's Art Competition, now in its 63rd year, were celebrated in a week-long art exhibition entitled 'Time and Space' – A Celebration of Texaco Children's Art Success in Laois' which opened at the Laois Arthouse Gallery, Stradbally on Thursday 21st September.



Curated by Lucy Deegan, the 2017 Laois Culture Night Ambassador, the exhibits included the colourful portrait study of her brother Tom, carefully executed with colouring pencils and white gel pen, which won Lucy the top prize in the 63rd Texaco Children's Art Competition.

Also amongst the exhibits at Stradbally were works by three other Laois students all of whom featured highly in the competition this year. A portrait study entitled 'Weathered Wisdom' by 13-years old Ciarán Leonard, a pupil at St. Mary's CBS Portlaoise, which took second prize in the 12-13 years age category. Other young Laois winners whose winning works featured were sister and brother Asma Zulfikar (age 14), from Scoil Chríost Rí, Portlaoise and Abdul Ahad Zulfikar (age 6), from Holy Family Junior School, Portlaoise. Family and friends of the young artists attended the opening including classmates and teachers from CBS Portlaoise, who came to support Ciarán Leonard. Students and teachers from the local Cosby NS also came to enjoy the work of the young artists.

Lucy spoke very eloquently in both Irish and English at the opening, about her interest in art and the benefits and enjoyment that making art can bring, saying "all that children really need to make art is Time and Space and a few colouring pencils".

A pupil of Gaelcholáiste Cheatharlach in Carlow Town, Lucy Deegan is the daughter of well-known tourism industry figure, Jim Deegan – founder of the Railtours Ireland First Class organisation, and his wife Fionnuala – herself an accomplished animation artist whose work features in Hollywood blockbusters 'An American Tail' and 'All Dogs Go To Heaven'.

No stranger to the Competition, Lucy has featured amongst the prizewinners on five occasions to date. Her three siblings, brother Tom and sisters Annie Rose and Juliet, have also won prizes in previous years.

As part of her prizewinning package, 17-years old Lucy from Luggacurran received a top prize of €1,500 plus an invitation to visit Tokyo extended

by the International Foundation for Arts and Culture where she was an honoured guest at a ceremony held in conjunction with the 18th International High School Arts Festival in which her winning artwork was exhibited.

Underlining the support that exists for the Texaco Children's Art Competition is the fact that, over the past five years alone, some 2,799 entries were received from young Laois artists – a figure that confirms the view that the number of entries submitted by Laois students since the competition first began in 1955 amounts to some tens of thousands.

The exhibition was launched by Cathaoirleach of Laois County Council Padraig Fleming. Speaking about the exhibition, the Cathaoirleach said, 'the level of young talent in our county is evident from the art works on display. The work is breathtaking. Choosing Lucy Deegan as Culture Night Ambassador is a very fitting honour. She is an inspiration to all art lovers, young and old in our county.'

Niamh Algar

Mullingar Actor to star in new Channel 4 Drama

Channel 4's new four part television drama 'The Virtues' will feature Mullingar actor, Niamh Algar. Niamh was also the female lead – Olivia, in the independent Irish horror feature film 'Without Name' (2017) which premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival, London BFI Film Festival and Sitges International Film Festival. She is also known for her work as young Ruby Walsh in Pebbles.

Shane Meadows of 'This is England' fame will star alongside Algar, he plays Joseph, a moral yet troubled man who's lost everything he ever held dear and who finds himself compelled to travel to

Ireland to confront the demons from a childhood spent in the care system that continue to haunt him, with savage and brutal consequences. His path soon crosses that of Dinah (Algar's character) who is fiery and unafraid to stand up for herself, but who is also deeply guarded, with a secret she is hiding from those around her.

At once an unlikely love story between two people cast adrift in life and an exploration of the conflict between sin and virtue the Wrap Films production will shoot primarily on location in Sheffield, as well as in Liverpool and Belfast and will air on Channel 4 in 2019.



Michael Boran and Stephan Loughman are two artists of the same generation with family ties to Co. Laois. Within each of their practices they investigate the changing dynamic between our perception of the natural landscape and the ever expanding built environment.

In his photographs Boran pictures towers, pylons, masts, plant stalks and monuments from a Piranesian vantage point that places the viewer far below the pictorial object. The desire to ascend is a prevalent motif in this recent body of work in which Boran represents the urge or instinct to reach upward, to peak, to seek out the most prominent positions. Often blurring the line between natural and manmade, Boran poses visual similarities in patterns formed by vines and power lines as they tangle and drape. We are also presented with the idea of pairing and of duality. Through the imagery, which often simulates the visual codes and studio finesse of stock photography, we are invited to consider the idea of doubles and dichotomies, of objects growing into one another.

Loughman's recent paintings have taken vintage postcards issued by the Women's Institute in Britain as their source material and subject matter. The use of these postcards, which the artist bought in bulk at online auctions, represents a departure from his previous method of painting from film stills and yet the work retains a filmic quality. Images of the English countryside appear lushly detailed though curiously deadpan and while the source material documents picturesque landscapes, their corresponding paintings appear densely ominous, as plotted points within a broader narrative. Through time spent with Loughman's paintings, it begins to emerge that a history has been obfuscated or perhaps

veneered. These seemingly idyllic images appear constricted – imbued with a sense of unease or discomfort. The implication of such a device attests to Loughman's ability to modify or drastically alter the mood or tone of an image through the medium of paint.

In viewing these works by Boran and Loughman side by side we are presented with divergent forms of media that approach similar subject matter. Loughman's paintings feature tunnels, bridges and arches amidst verdant foliage, referencing architectural intervention in the landscape. Boran's photographs span the undergrowth of the garden to the heights of telegraph poles. As the works relate to one another, we can observe a multitude of connections and affinities. Throughout the exhibition, both artists consider the softening boundaries between rural and urban.

The exhibition ran from 21 October to 11 November at Dunamais Arts Centre Gallery, Portlaoise.

Michael Boran (b. 1969) lives and works in Dublin. Recent solo and two-person exhibitions include *Through the Undergrowth*, Kevin Kavanagh, Dublin (2016), *Parallel Lines*, Michael Boran & Igor Eskinja, Kevin Kavanagh, Dublin (2011), *Michael Boran & Ethna O'Regan*, Photo Ireland Festival, Monster Truck | Temple Bar, Dublin (2010) and *Voyager*, Kevin Kavanagh, Dublin (2008). Selected group exhibitions include *Schrift in Der Kunst*, Kunstverein Bamberg, Germany (2015), *Art Brussels*, with Kevin Kavanagh, Brussels, Belgium (2015) and *False Memory Syndrome*, Temple Bar Gallery, Dublin (2013). Boran's photography books have featured in numerous

Michael Boran and Stephan Loughman

Dunamais Arts Centre and Kevin Kavanagh, Dublin present an exhibition of recent work by Stephan Loughman and Michael Boran from 21 October to 11 November at Dunamais Gallery, Portlaoise.

book fairs such as *Dublin Art Book Fair*, Temple Bar Gallery & Studios, Dublin (2015) and his work is held in important public and private collections including the Arts Council of Ireland, Bank of Ireland, National Self-Portrait Collection, Trinity College Dublin, The Hunt Collection, The Osman Collection, AXA Ireland, BP Oil Europe and the Office of Public Works. Michael Boran has been the recipient of several awards including the AIB Bank *Here and Now* Photography Prize (2006).

Stephan Loughman (b. 1969) lives and works in Dublin. Recent solo exhibitions include *WI*, Kevin Kavanagh, Dublin (2016), *Interiors*, Kevin Kavanagh, Dublin (2013), *Fisherman's Widow*, Cake Contemporary Arts, Kildare (2010) and *OUR VICTORY*, Kevin Kavanagh, Dublin (2009). Recent selected group exhibitions include *Hold to the Now*, SLAG Gallery, New York (2015), *Art Brussels*, Brussels, (2015), *Exiles*, The Lab, Foley Street, Dublin (2013), *Last*, Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin (2012), *Collecting the New*, Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin (2010), *What Happens Next is a Secret*, Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin (2010) and *Summer Show*, Galerie Bugdahn und Kaimmer, Dusseldorf, Germany (2009). Loughman has taken part in international art fairs and biennials including a solo presentation at *VOLTA NY 12*, New York (2012) and a group exhibition at the 26th Sao Paulo Biennale, Brazil (2004). He was the recipient of the Arts Council Bursary in 2003 and in 2006 as well as the Arts Council Travel Award in 2000. His work is held in numerous public collections including the Irish Museum of Modern Art, the Arts Council of Ireland, the Office of Public Works and Dublin City University as well as Private Collections in Ireland, UK, Spain and U.S.A.

Tapestry of Light

Silver netting of the dawn,
Embroidered through the silent night,
Woven into dewy webs,
Suspended tapestry of light.

Cobwebs greet the morning air,
Strings of priceless jewels glistening,
Veiling gateway, bush and tree,
Lending wonder to our waking.

Nature's gift holds me enthralled,
Treasure of the dawning day,
Till the fairy breezes call,
Stealing all my dreams away

© John Sheahan

***Tapestry of Light – Ireland's bogs and wetlands as never seen before* by photographer Tina Claffey and published by Artisan House Connemara was launched on Thursday, 12th October, 2017 in Tailor's Hall, Dublin.**

Tapestry of Light is a stunningly beautiful book containing Tina Claffey's unique perspective of the flora and fauna of the unspoiled raised bogs and wet woodlands of the Irish midlands. The habitat value of raised bogs arises from their rich diversity of flora and fauna such as bog-rosemary, lichens, sundews, butterflies, moths, dragonflies, frogs and spiders all of which thrive in the sphagnum mosses.

The foreword to *Tapestry of Light* is by geologist, botanist and broadcaster, Dr. John Feehan. The title 'Tapestry of Light' is taken from the eponymous poem by John Sheahan, whose poetry is included in the book.

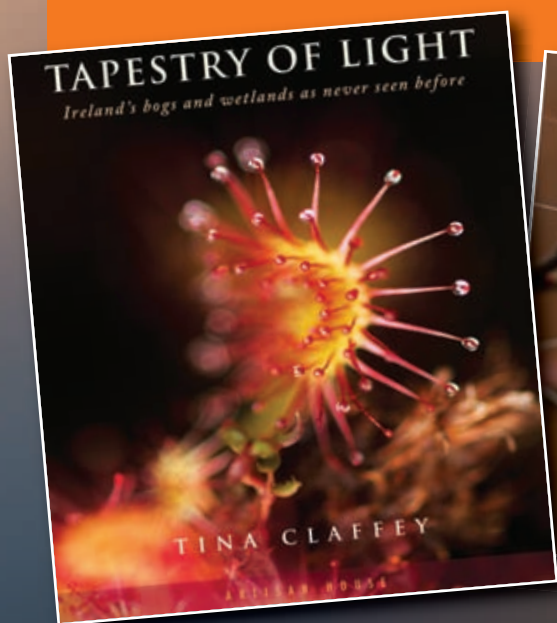
Tina Claffey attributes her interest in her home area and in particular the bogs and wetlands, to the influence of her father, to whom the book is dedicated, and to time spent in Botswana photographing pristine wilderness.

"On my return to Ireland, I felt quite lost for some time but then I went on a field walk led by John Feehan in Killaun Bog. That walk was an epiphany for me. Here on my doorstep was a wilderness with as much significance as the Kalahari desert".

Matthijs Schouten, ecologist and founder of the Dutch Foundation for the Conservation of Irish Bogs, will launch the book. "Never before have I seen the magic of bogs captured so beautifully as in this book. The photographs and poems lead us into a truly enchanted world."

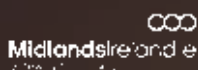
The book is available in two editions, a standard hardback edition and a special limited edition of 75 copies which contains gatefolds and an original print signed, dated and numbered by Tina Claffey which is suitable for framing.

The standard hardback edition is available in all good bookshops.
| For more information contact www.artisanhouse.ie or www.tinaclaffey.com



MidlandsArts and Culture Magazine

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



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