

# MIDLANDS ARTS AND CULTURE

a review  
of the  
arts in  
laois  
westmeath  
offaly and  
longford

SUMMER  
2009



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# Foreword...

I was delighted when I received a phone call from Muireann Ní Chonaill, Arts Officer, Laois County Council, inviting me to edit The Midlands Arts and Culture Magazine. I felt a great sense of coming home.

I enjoyed all the tasks that an editor has. I received the 'contents' over the weeks and I read of all the exciting events that have taken place, and even more exciting are the events that are yet to take place.

Gifts beyond imaginings are on offer for all, for the arts are truly strong and inclusive in Westmeath, Longford, Offaly and Laois. For the theme of the feature pages I decided to ask some people who have carved out a distinctive path in the arts world, if I could journey alongside them, hear some of their story that brought them to their present walk of life. Many people discover as they go life's road that unimagined chance or luck comes their way, and if they follow it, they find within themselves a rich well of resourcefulness, and in it a special gift.

I was privileged to accompany three very creative, courteous and kind people on a little of their way, shared so generously with me. They were Seamus Hosey, Ursula Meehan, and Eugene O'Brien. Seamus Hosey is a Senior Broadcaster and Producer in the Arts and Feature Department in RTE Radio 1. A former Laois Person of the Year, Seamus spoke of his childhood days in Corbally, his parents' gifts, the special place of books, radio, music, drama in their home, and the people who shone light on his way. Seamus now shines his special light of communication and of fostering literary talent.

I journeyed a while with Ursula Meehan, a visual artist who lives in Castletown, County Westmeath. We travelled back generations, met picture framers and fiddle makers. Renowned

**Ann Egan is a multi-award winning poet from County Laois. Awarded a County Laois University Scholarship, she has M.A. in History; B.A. in Languages. Her prizes include: The Annaghmakerrig Prize; American Ireland Fund; Writers' Week Listowel; RTE Radio 75 Years; Offaly Millennium Poet; Oki Prize and many more. Her books are; Landing the Sea (Bradshaw Books), The Wren Women (Black Mountain Press), Brigit of Kildare (Kildare Library and Arts Services). She has held several residencies, edited twelve books; co-edited The Great Book of Maynooth. The Wren Women was dramatised at Writers' Week, Listowel. Her work has been broadcast on RTE Radio 1 and elsewhere. She is widely published at home and abroad.**



poet, Brendan Kennelly dropped money in the hat as a young girl painted pavement Madonnas. We paused on the Via Borghese, studied painted streets across Europe. We heard home calling to Ursula.

Eugene O'Brien, the writer from Edenderry, County Offaly whose plays, television and film scripts have won international acclaim, invited me to sit beside his child self in the Savoy, the pictures, where we gazed into creations of filmmaker Sam Peckinpah. Eugene spoke of his parents' encouragement, and the shared love of drama he had with father. He recalled his acting days and the how they led him to his writing. He spoke of Pure Mule and its success. He spoke also of life's hardships.

They were my three companions who so warmly shared their road to where they are now as broadcaster, artist and writer. I hope you enjoy their company.

Neil Donnelly from Tullamore, County Offaly, one of Ireland's most talented playwrights, gifted this magazine his wonderful short story, The Virtuous Woman. This story too was a journey on many levels. It leaves me still engaged days after I had the joy of reading it.

I leave a little poem present to Rang a Sé, Gaelscoil Phortlaoise to mark their way. I hope they and all young people enjoy all their creativity.

I hope you too enjoy your journey with us all in The Midland Arts and Culture Magazine and you find continuing and unimagined 'chances' for your unique creativity in the many and varied paths in arts and culture in which the midlands, Westmeath and Offaly, Longford and Laois, abound.

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

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

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

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

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

A journey with...

# SEAMUS HOSEY

Broadcaster  
Senior Producer  
Arts and Features Department  
RTE Radio 1



## A Corbally Childhood

I grew up on a farm in the townland of Corbally, just outside Abbeyleix. I was the eldest of four. My father was a farmer; my mother had worked in Portlaoise Library before they got married. It was a house which was very lively, full of neighbours visiting, playing card games, storytelling, a lot of laughter, a lot of fun. There were books, the radio was very important.

My father, as well as farming, was very interested in politics, and at one stage was Chairman of Laois County Council. He was a very strong supporter of the Fianna Fáil Party. He was involved in local drama, parish affairs; in many ways he was a politician, he was involved in community affairs. He would have been involved in the local creamery, would have been very popular, and would have known everybody, and would have been widely known.

Later in his life he was Chairman of Laois County Council.

He was a musician, a very talented man, and I suppose it is only in retrospect that you see the many gifts that your parents have. My mother would also

have been a great encourager. They were both very encouraging that the family, the four of us would follow our own particular vocations.

## Raheen Hall

When we were children, myself and my sister, Mary, we learned Irish Dancing. My father would play the fiddle accompanying us, at the annual concerts in Raheen Hall, there would be a variety section and the play. My father would have directed the play, and sometimes acted in it as well. He really was somebody of great talent, and of broad interests.

## David Marcus

One very important landmark for me was when I was seventeen, the Saturday Irish Press, under the editorship of David Marcus, began publishing New Irish Writing. I remember opening, with a great sense of excitement, that page.

## Laois County Council Scholarship

One other factor that was of great importance was that four scholarships were given on the basis of an exam. I was lucky enough to get a Laois County

Council Scholarship which enabled me to go to boarding school.

Knockbeg College had quite a liberal agenda in education. In Fifth Year our religion teacher, Fr Paddy Shine, used to bring in to class, copies of Hibernia Magazine, and say, 'Read it, make up your own minds.'

## Helen Roe

The librarian in Portlaoise was Helen Roe, an extraordinary woman, and my mother worked as an assistant to the librarian before she got married.

Helen Roe had graduated from Trinity College and came back to Laois as librarian. She used to send my family books for birthdays, Christmas, Easter.

Her house was filled with books, she knew writers. She knew Frank O'Connor, Yeats, she knew everybody. Here was a woman who was a living link, in touch with world writing.

Her effect on myself and her friendship with the family, right until her death was very important. She kept in touch with me right through my school days, my college days, and was a great encourager, a very important figure.

## RTE Radio 1

I taught for ten years. I got involved in radio, in reviewing books and theatre, doing freelance journalism.

My day job was teaching, but I had a parallel career which drew me nearer and nearer the big move which I made in 1985 which was into RTE Radio.

I was lucky enough to move into an RTE Radio which still had a great heritage of older producers like Maxwell Sweeney, John Skeehan.

The excitement of being in the radio canteen with the actors whose names I had known growing up in County Laois, like Neasa Ní Arráchain, Peg Monaghan, Eamon Keane - these would have been my heroes – because radio was a huge influence on me!

## Leningrad to Japan

I felt very much that I was coming home, moving to work in radio, and I was lucky enough to work on arts programs, books, poetry programs, to get to travel, to go abroad.

When The Abbey Theatre took John B. Keane's *The Field* and Tom Mc Intyre's adaptation of *The Great Hunger* to Leningrad and Moscow, I got to travel there to make radio documentaries.

I went to Jerusalem for *Juno* and the *Paycock*, Broadway for *Dancing* at Lughnasa.

I made documentaries in Japan, in Argentina. I was in Paris for Beckett's eightieth birthday celebration.

## Speaking Volumes

So, as producer in The Arts and Features Department of RTE Radio, I had served a great apprenticeship to Maxwell Sweeney, who produced *Sunday Miscellany*. Having people like Benedict Kiely, Anthony Cronin, Sean J. White - a Laois man, come in to record was a pleasure.

Producing The Arts Programme, having the privilege of having my own programmes which I presented, was a great joy. Like *Speaking Volumes*, where I went to people's homes, and talked to them about their favourite books.

Among the people I had the privilege of interviewing were: John B. Keane; Bryan MacMahon; Maureen Potter; Ian Paisley; Seamus Heaney; Brendan Kennelly and John Montague.

## Twenty Five Years in Radio

In 1975 I first came to Listowel Writers' Week where we are now, that was a revelation! To come to Listowel to make programmes, to give workshops, to be exposed to a great array of people and to be in a position to record them, and to know that in Radio Archives there are interviews representing a huge cross section of people involved in the arts, is wonderful.

We have The Annual Short Story Competition in memory of Francis MacManus which is also next year celebrating its twenty fifth year. I had the good fortune to be involved in that since its beginning. We have broadcast something in the region of five hundred short stories. Among the host of names that got their first breaks are: Claire Keegan; Martin Malone; Molly McCluskey.

## The Arts in County Laois

When I was growing up, you really had to be very determined and fairly lucky, and make your own luck in the pursuit of arts.

But I think now with the development of the arts centres around the country, in particular the wonderful Dunamais Arts Centre, they bring world theatre and music and writers right into the heart of the county.

With the appointments of the Arts Officers, like the wonderful Muireann Ní Chonaill, and with funding from The Arts Council, people have the opportunity to go to see a play by Beckett. The arts are being brought right into the heart of the community.

With the changing face of a town like Portlaoise, the changing demographic position, there is a thriving arts community reflecting the arts, music and tradition of countries outside of Ireland, and in the meeting of arts and culture there is a whole change in the reality.

I think nowadays it's much easier for young people to have the opportunities to have direct access to a wide range of arts.

That is something that I think that has been the most remarkable progress and experience that I have observed over the last thirty - thirty five years.

Finally I would say that the aim of people working in radio, particularly in the arts area, would be to reflect and to cover, to continue to give airtime to the huge variety of voices, multinational, multicultural that are emerging, and have emerged over the years.

# A journey with...

# URSULA MEEHAN

## VISUAL ARTIST

### A Bowl of Eggs

I've been living in Castletown for fifteen years. I grew up in Artane and Sutton. I grew with art in the family. My father, Vincent Meehan is a craftsman, he makes silver and enamel jewellery. He went to The National College of Art and Design at night, where he met my mother, Anne, and by day he worked as a salesman for The Gas Company. My grandfather ran a picture framing business, Mulvany's on the Quays; he also did a lot of restoration work.

My mother worked as co- director in a screen printing business. My mother taught me to draw. I remember sitting at the kitchen table, drawing a bowl of eggs, the shading was so awkward, and she gave me pointers.

### Growing Up With Art

Within the family, I have a lot of cousins who are artistic; they teach art, one is a violin maker; his brother is a clock restorer. Another cousin – Claire Mulvany, wrote a book – 'One Wild Life'. I have three sisters; my elder sister has a degree in Visual Art. My second sister works in enamelling and copper jewellery. My third sister is a Physical Education teacher, denies she's got any artistic leanings, but that's not true.

### A Street Drawer and a Poet

I did art in secondary school. Then I went to The College of Marketing and Design. I studied Graphic Art. In hindsight, I suppose I can see that that didn't really suit me. I decided I wanted to see the world instead – I was probably running away. So I started doing street drawings around Dublin. Brendan Kennelly used to pass early in the morning, and he would drop some money in the hat, he was always smiley.

### Irish Paintings on the Via Borghese

I travelled for a number of years doing street drawings. I used to spend my winters in Rome; I'd meet other street drawers. You were like a little community, a tribe.

There is one street drawer I'd like to mention – Kurt Wenner, from California. He introduced a 3D element, trompe l'oeil. I did all the madonnas, and Leech on Via Borghese. I went to Switzerland, Germany and Belgium. At some point I stopped, I didn't want to do it anymore. My life had to change. I came back to Ireland.

### White Line Designs

I suppose you fall into the things you do. I set up a business doing murals and paint effects with Wendy Doyle. The first bar we did was The Bleeding Horse. We ran that business for a couple of years. I ended up having to look more to home; you'd be away, so it was difficult for me with a family.

### A Rainforest in Castletown

I got more involved in Community Arts. I had worked as a resource teacher. It was a good insight to have later as an artist in residence. In Castletown National School, there is a rainforest with mosaic animals on which I worked with the children. A teacher from Australia influenced the idea. My approach was it was about the children doing it, and it was great when they became so confident, they'd nearly say they didn't need me!

### You, Me and a Window of Opportunity

In the last few years I have tried to focus on developing my own art, in between doing commissions. Last year I did The Arts and Empowerment Facilitation Course in Crawford College. Currently I work part time in St Peter's, Castlepollard, a centre for adults with intellectual disability. Last year we all completed a project, initiated by an idea of Teresa Doyle, an artist colleague, called – You, Me and a Window of Opportunity - where we brought out our students' art for exhibition in windows of Castlepollard Businesses.

### Sweepings

I had an exhibition called 'Sweepings', which focussed on having to sweep a floor every day, but I used paint and a sweeping brush, and verbalised the thoughts I had about the chore. That was significant; it was much more abstract, and more me.

### Enamelling and Flowers

What I would say about Art is that it has brought me places physically. Mentally it is just a stimulation in your thoughts and ideas, where you go with them. My mother finds art in her garden, my father, aged 81, is still enamelling, still trying out new ways. So I suppose with Art, it is for life!

For further information contact [ursulamee@hotmail.com](mailto:ursulamee@hotmail.com)

# The Artist's Studio...

The space and function of the artist's studio has been on my mind.

The fact that I am clearing and reorganising my own studio is the reason for this preoccupation.

Having evolved into part-office, part-library and part-painting studio, without any plan or forethought, it has reached a point where it is a mess.

In total disarray, with fallout from past projects left on every possible surface, piles of tottering pages spewing to the floor, paints and brushes engulfed with assorted débris, my studio has reached a point where it is dictating how I am painting. Decisions on what to paint, and on what brush to use, are made by what comes to hand. Colour is no longer a choice, but what is spotted in the growing mass of visual disorder.

I can cope with that and view it as an artistic experiment - "The Artist no Longer in Control". What is getting to me in the end, is the lack of room to manoeuvre, the stumbling over water buckets and boxes – it's as if the studio was invading my personal body space.

The process of clearing is taking a while. As well as ridding myself of unnecessary "stuff", I also have to go through my more recent pieces of work, and discard the unneeded. Akin to a "culling", this can be quite a difficult but a necessary exercise. Over the last twenty years, I have kept key pieces of work as markers through time, keeping a record of work I have done, to see its development.

Sorting through a shelf of art books, I stop at "Francis Bacon's Studio". This book shows us Bacon through his studio, and gives us new insights into how he developed his ideas, and how he worked. In 1998, his studio was donated to the Hugh Lane Gallery in Dublin. It was painstakingly taken apart by archaeologists, conservators and curators, and brought to the gallery where it was carefully reconstructed. This was no easy feat. I recall visiting it two years ago. I thought, "Now, that's a real mess!"



Working on a Landscape Commission.

My attempt at describing it would not do it justice. I still recall the doors and walls encrusted with his colour palette, every surface piled high with discarded paints and brushes. The floor of débris, containing photos of models, medical catalogues, even champagne boxes, was feet deep in places, and carpeted everywhere. Everything that went into the studio seemed to stay. A total of seventy thousand objects were found in Bacon's studio. Each piece was carefully catalogued by the team of experts, and, through this process, more has been learnt about him and the inspiration for his work.

As I go through the process of creating order in my own working area, I reflect on my studio as a space. Mine is a private place. People don't often visit me here, but if someone does, I feel quite vulnerable as if they are seeing too much of who I am. In many ways, I feel that when people walk into my studio, they are walking into my brain.



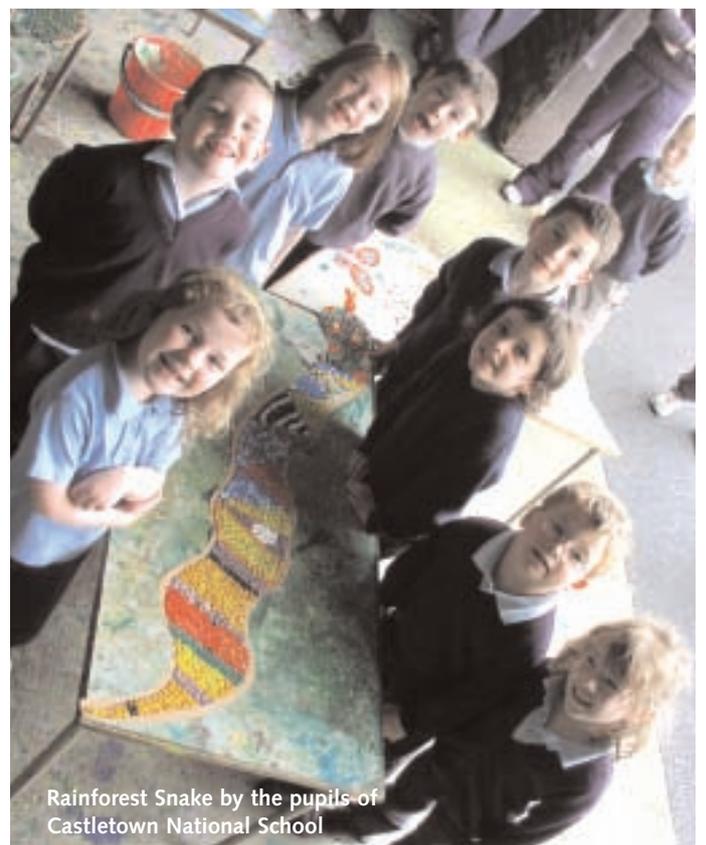
Street Drawing at College Green, Dublin 1985.

Studios are unique to the individuals who work in them. They vary from the well ordered to that of individuals like Bacon, who seemed to thrive on an apparently chaotic environment. By walking into a person's studio, and walking into their mind space, visitors see the flawed canvasses, the artist's attempts to create something, and the many steps it can take to achieve it. Most importantly, for the artist, the studio is a space to retreat from the world, where they can leave behind everyday events and tasks; let thoughts and ideas flow; and hopefully produce something worthwhile.

As I finish this clearing process, and see my space anew, I accept that in a short while once more, the space will fill up. What happens here happens.

There is unpredictability, a path being forged, and the studio, rather than being invasive, is perhaps a cooperative partner in the creative process.

Ursula Meehan is a visual artist, living in Co. Westmeath.



Rainforest Snake by the pupils of Castletown National School

A journey with...

# Members of The Dawning of Light Workshops Bealtaine in Laois

I drove along the roads of County Laois. I was excited about my work which was about to commence in Áras an Chontae, Portlaoise.

I had been invited by Muireann Ní Chonaill, Laois Arts Officer, to give creative writings workshops. I had my programme planned.

I had left our house early, had driven along beautiful, quiet lanes where violets still bloomed in the ditches, honeysuckle was curling around white flowers of the Maybush, and swallows swooped ahead of me like well trusted guides. I drove on through Mountmellick, beloved hometown of my mother, sent a silent greeting to my father's adored Kilcormac, and then on towards Portlaoise.

I felt proud to look on the magnificent statue of the great Laois man, James Fintan Lalor. I went in to the meeting room and soon met the people in the workshop. We were all settled in and warmly welcomed with good wishes from Muireann Ní Chonaill, and Bridie Keenan, Assistant Arts Officer. We introduced ourselves, talked a little of our interests because now, like the swallows we were going to guide each other.

I gave my exercise called: Light in the Spring. It was based on a remembered object of childhood.

The following workshop each person brought along a new piece of writing.

*Noreen Uí Laigin writes -*  
**Gift**

'The coal fires glowed in every room. We children toasted fingers and toes. Turkey stuffed with herbs sizzled, while pudding sweetly steamed.'  
*Catherine Smyth, Oonagh McKeagney and Philomena Flanagan celebrate bicycles.*

*Catherine describes -*  
**First Bicycle**

Fearful wobbling, trying to balance, cycling slowly, trying not to falter, arms outstretched to catch the tumble, joyful at each task conquered.

*Oonagh recalls her childhood -*  
**Red Bicycle**

What happened to you?  
What happened to us?  
Sadness came soon,  
loss, weeping, absence.  
My herald of unfolding bewilderment,  
your lesson - happiness,  
a balloon easily burst.

*Philomena describes her*  
*'spruced-up bike' -*

**Life Cycle**

My uncle, midwife mechanic,  
two jaded bikes had parented  
a customised creation,  
gleaming mongrel before me.

*Noelle O'Connell remembers*  
*her schoolbag -*

**Hold It Together**

Settled you on my bike's carrier,  
I'd listen for you as  
you shifted this way and that,  
we swayed to the road's curves.



Ann Egan  
Photo:  
Jeff Harvey

Our imagination piece for our following workshop centred on the light a particular person brings into our lives.

Once again, I was in for another great evening that was reminiscent of my childhood nights in Laois when neighbours gathered in, sat around the fire and told stories.

We were in one of the most modern buildings in the country, pristine, balanced, technological, with all the shades of Slieve Bloom Mountains in its artistry, the patriot James Fintan Lalor standing proudly outside, and yet we could all have been in an old rambling house, enthralled by the content and variety of the writings.

*Storm Powell blesses her father -*  
**Father**

You were my protector  
from the cruel and harsh,  
made me feel safe, content.  
You were my guide.



Creative Writing Workshops with Ann Egan  
Photo: Jeff Harvey

*Sharon Foley writes  
of a mother- daughter dilemma -  
**Long Ears, Long Life***

She pronounces a good mind is  
better than good looks any day,  
casts covert glances in  
every mirror she meets.

*Heather Harris muses on magic -  
**Druid***

'Fairy hands reach through the veil  
to gift you with seeds of words  
which take root, grow,  
flowering in tales that will warm you  
through the cold winter  
of another land.'

*Amanda Kelly's tightly crafted poem  
gives a family portrait through a  
powerful metaphor –  
**Stew***

Simmering stew,  
wet cuttings binned,  
the Pope's words  
soak our Mother.

Black marked,  
she ladles goodness into  
clean, white bowls.

Head bowed,  
she incants blessings  
on us –  
her melting pot.

*Annemarie Ni Churreáin  
weaves a child's wonder -  
**Mona***

'And oh, she was the seamstress of  
narratives! Her hands were a loom.  
They were light instruments of the air.  
I spent a childhood in her apron wings,  
following her feet, listening to her  
stories of faraway lands.'

Our third exercise was based in nature  
with which Laois is blessed in its quiet  
beauty whose mystique rolls down from  
Slieve Bloom, transforms to sea bluebells,  
moon buttercups. From observing busy  
writing that was taking place in our ten  
minute 'gather all we can from the  
moment,' I felt the final writing would  
not disappoint. And it didn't!

*Maurice Murphy celebrates nature -  
**Belated Spring***

Robin at my feet, alert and unafraid,  
awaits with laser eyes another meal.  
Blackbird, thrush, woodquest too,  
in song proclaim nature's  
birthing and rebirth.

*Ann Marie Foley describes barley –  
**Harvest***

Each rosary of beaded grain,  
whiskers, prickly to touch,  
sends up a haze,  
a dewy sway  
in the morning breeze.

I was privileged to have heard over  
thirty pieces of writings based on The  
Dawning Light Workshops. We were

visited and encouraged by Muireann Ní  
Chonail who invited us all to the Arts  
Award Evening taking place in Áras an  
Chontae, a very fitting conclusion to  
our workshops, opening vistas of  
opportunities through potential grants  
and awards, in the nurturing  
atmosphere of County Laois Arts.

Bealtaine was drawing to its close as I  
drove back along roads, bordered with  
mayflower, to winding lanes that  
brought me into the ancient beauty,  
close to the banks of beautiful Elba Bog  
where violets and buttercups folded  
their petals in sleep, the honeysuckle  
had yet to blossom, and swallows  
rested.

#### **Rang a Sé agus Stefanie**

Maidine dé Luain.  
Leath uair tar éis a naoi.  
Cnag, cnag ar an doras,  
Cerb í? Ón nGhearmáin, - ár Stefanie!

Le sreang agus miotal,  
Capaill farraige 's mílte éisc,  
Daphne agus Apollo,  
Agus daltaí as Rang a Sé,

Le théama na farraige,  
Agus mol an oige, go deo,  
Bhí an domhain fíor brodúil.  
Reitigh sí go hiontach leo,

**Agus reitigh siadsan léi.  
Ann Egan**

A journey with...

# EUGENE O'BRIEN

Writer

## THE SAVOY

I grew up in Edenderry. First time I got interested in storytelling was – our family owned a cinema, The Savoy, in the town in The Square. Every Saturday they would have a matinée there. And if they didn't have a suitable film, they'd put on whatever they had the night before. The one I always remember is the opening sequence of the western –The Wild Bunch. Sam Peckinpah gives an exact image at the beginning, with kids playing with scorpions in an ants' nest. No dialogue, it is a metaphor for what you're going to see. He was very famous for making violent pictures but if you look beyond that, he had poetic sensibility. He was an extraordinary individual, but at his best he had a very Irish sense of regret, loss, --he was an alcoholic. So we'd see quite violent westerns, loads of things; we'd love obviously the Disney kids' cartoons. So that fired the imagination and that's where I traced it back to – this interest in story and cinema.

## MY PARENTS

I was lucky enough to be encouraged by my parents, especially my father, Eugene O'Brien who always had a great interest in film and in shows. I went to Rathmines College and did Communications there. We would write and try to learn how to make films. I spent a lot of time in front of the camera, I did acting. For about ten years after college, I was a professional, freelance actor. While I was doing that I was writing all the time. I'd be putting smaller shows on around Dublin.

## EDEN

Things changed about nine years ago. I wrote this play, Eden, I worked off in my spare time. The Abbey took it up then and I was very lucky to get it on there. I got a great director, Colm McPherson, he was a very experienced guy, he was great to work with on your first play. The play came out in January 2001 with a brilliant cast – Dan Wycherley and Catherine Walsh. They were fantastic. That became a hit. Everyone was talking about it. It was an amazing thing for me. Out of that I set upon the career of a writer properly then.

## PURE MULE

The pure Mule came out of that. The producer had read the play, and he wanted to see was I interested in working in TV. Pure Mule was developed over four years – from first meeting



to going on air. Then there was a year gap in between. It looked like it was dead in the water for about a year. The producers kept on at RTE to do it. RTE said OK and we started writing it again. Declan Recks, from Clara was the producer. It aired in September'05; it had a big impact in the country. People were talking about it. It was great, very gratifying. It's a whole team of people who make these things happen.

I worked very closely with a script editor who is very important, the two of us came up with ideas, we collaborated for storylines. In comparison to other TV stories, Pure Mule was less concerned with story, but more concerned about how the characters related and felt, their hearts, the choices they were making.

We're actually filming a special in two weeks time. A two hour special, where we will revisit the town, now in recession. It's all top secret at the moment but we will be on in September!

## VANCOUVER TO MARRAKESH TO OFFALY

The main thing we did then was adapting the play of Eden into a film which we shot two years ago. We spent the last year going around to loads of film festivals from Vancouver to Marrakesh. It was terribly interesting to see your audience who probably have just about heard of Ireland but certainly have never heard of Offaly!

## LOUISE O'BRIEN

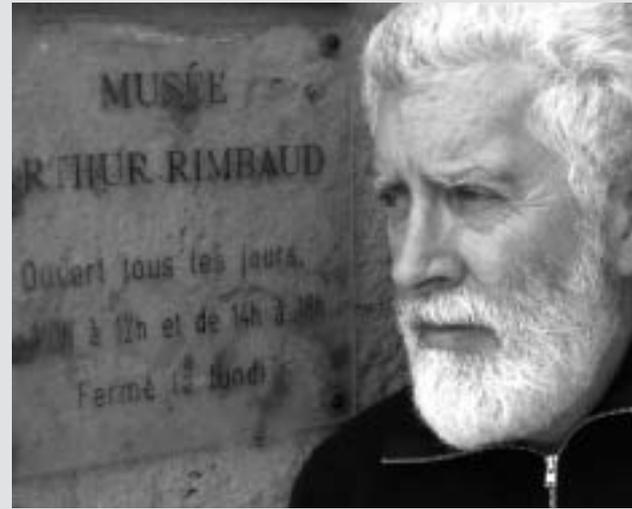
Earlier this year my sister, Louise O'Brien, an amazing artist, had her solo show in Áras an Chontae, Tullamore. Although always painting, she hadn't exhibited for a while because she has two great children.

## LESSONS

You're always developing ideas and scripts. Sometimes they're made, a lot of times they're not. You have to be prepared for disappointment in this game, as in every walk of life and you have to be prepared to get up and get on with it. I did write a second play called Savoy, it was in the Peacock in 2004, and it was the little baby that didn't quite — people didn't take to it, it was flawed. You probably learn more from failure, in many ways, I think more than success.

A New Short Story  
from Neil Donnelly...

# The Virtuous WOMAN



Martin had booked the table by the window overlooking the harbour where two swans were statue still on the May evening water.

His mobile rang.

He saw it was his daughter Maeve.

'Hi,' he answered.

She started singing,

'Happy birthday to you, Happy Birthday dear Daddy, Happy birthday to you!'

'Thanks Maeve, I'm waiting for Mum, she's held up in the traffic, we're dining out.'

'What part of dirty Dublin are ye in?'

'We're in Flanagan's. How're things?'

'Just came out from the Wallace Collection.'

'You found it ok?'

'Just off Wigmore Street, like you said.'

'You see all the Armour?'

'Oh yes, but I discovered a wonderful painting "The Virtuous Woman" by Nicolaes Maes who was once a pupil of Rembrandt's.'

'Oh, right.'

'She's very mysterious.'

'Who is?'

'The Girl in the Painting, she looks about 17, looks like she's brainwashed or something. Enslavement of the times, you'd call it. Really weird.'

'Thank you.'

'What's that?'

'I've just been handed the menu.'

'Look Dad, you and Mum have a great night, ok.'

'Mind yourself.'

Maeve was gone, melted back into the London evening. Martin smiled in acknowledgement as the waitress showed him the wine list. Her name, Krystyna, was printed in red on a white background and pinned to the black jacket of her waitress uniform.

'Would you like a drink while you are waiting?'

'Better hold off until my wife gets here.'

'I'll come back in a few minutes.'

She smiled gently and went away. She was in her 30's, with sandy hair tied back and was yet another of those poised, attractive East European women who were now adding grace to the restaurants of Ireland. He saw Rose, his wife, hurrying in at the door. She plopped the Irish Times down on the table then flopped down on the seat opposite and swept her tangled black hair from her forehead.

'I'm Jaggered! Bloody Traffic! Order me a drink, willya!' she searched in her handbag. Martin raised his hand and Krystyna came across.

'A gin and tonic for my wife please, and a glass of house red for me,' Martin said.

'Make that two house red,' Rose added, still rooting in the bag. The waitress went away.

'On the way here, I dropped in at Mammy's. She was shouting at 'Judge Judy' again, calling her an arrogant snob who only takes it out on stupid people.'

Rose finally found what she had been looking for and withdrew a folded white form and passed it across to Martin.

'Could you deal with this?'

'What is it?'

'I didn't know it was after four o'clock.  
I was parked on a through way.'

'Not again!'

'A young country cop out to make a name for himself.  
That haircut is too tight!'

Martin put his hand up and felt the bristles of his freshly cut hair. 'I thought I'd go for broke on my birthday, big night out!' He tried a feeble smile but Rose shook her head and opened her menu.

'Asparagus Soup! Great! Oh and here's the booze!' Rose beamed as Krystyna put the drinks on the table along with a small basket of bread rolls and butter.

'Thank you,' Martin said and picked up his red wine glass and tapped it against Rose's.

'Happy landings!' he smiled nervously.

'Another one bites the dust!' Rose said.

They gave their order, Krystyna poured water from the jug into their tumbler glasses and went away.

'She's looking for a big tip,' Rose said.

'She's just doing her job'

'How do they all manage to get into the country, that's what I'd like to know,' Rose stared after her.

'Maeve phoned.'

'Did she say anything about her apartment?'

'No'

'Living in Finchley, she's too far out, and the Tube fares are astronomical.'

'Well she could move closer to the city ... or change her job.'

'Well she's hardly going to change her job so that she can live near her apartment, now is she?'

Rose again buried her head in the menu as if it were an engrossing detective thriller.

What does she expect him to do about Maeve's London apartment? Organise the finances for another? No! No, let Maeve stay where she is and work out other travel arrangements. This pampering of their only child had to stop.

Though Rose was a Maths Teacher at a prestigious school it was Martin's accounting astuteness that had created the necessary funds in the first place. Martin looked out the window into the Harbour. He couldn't see the swans. Maybe they had gone downstream. He took another sip of red wine and tried not to look at Rose. It hadn't always been like this but it had been a long time since it had been anything else.

He preferred to remember the good times. He had a long way to think back. But he always hoped for a renewal. He looked away again, this time into the restaurant proper. At other tables, couples, families, were chatting and laughing, people seemed happy. Krystyna smiled as she came towards him with the soup tray. He smiled back. She put out the bowls of warm green liquid, a little leaf floating on the top.

'You didn't put my car into the garage to get that back door problem sorted out,'

Rose said as she lifted a spoon to her mouth.

'The mechanic who usually does the car is out sick.'

'Couldn't someone else do it?'

Martin glanced at Krystyna who was topping up the glasses with water.

'They could but the other fella is a genius.'

'But he wasn't there.'

Martin sipped soup and hoped Krystyna would soon go away.

'What if the door opens and someone falls out?'

'It's the back door, *you* won't fall out, you'll be driving.'

'What if I'm giving someone a lift?'

'If someone is in the passenger seat, they can't fall out the back door, can they?'

'But if the car is full and there are students in the back that I am responsible for and one of them falls out because of a faulty door that hasn't been fixed because the genius of a mechanic wasn't available while the non-genius mechanic was, but wasn't allowed to do it, then I am up shit creek!'

Krystyna swept some bread crumbs into her hand and quietly slipped away. He tried to put a spoon of asparagus to his lips but he put it back in the bowl. He breathed rapidly. He sat back. He looked away. All the other happy animated faces. He again told himself it hadn't always been like this. How many more times could he draw up good memories to quash these bad moments? Years ago on his birthdays she'd surprise him. A cake with lit candles brought in by a waiter. A Chris Rea song request played for him on the radio. Little touches like that had filled him with joy. He nearly always did something for her birthdays though she had begun to dismiss his efforts in latter years. Next year he will be 50, maybe there might be a change then, there had to be. Even Rose had to acknowledge such a milestone, hadn't she?

'Look Rose, you take my car for the next few days and I'll get the door on your car fixed, alright?'

'Thank you,' Rose said. She was appeased. Maybe the warm soup had helped.

Krystyna brought the main course. They ate in silence. A shaven headed waiter brought the coffees. Martin looked

out the window at the harbour but it was getting quite dark. Wherever the swans were now, they were well settled down for the night.

'Call for the bill!' Rose said and Martin put his hand in the air until he caught Krystyna's attention and made the scribble sign. She brought it on a silver plate and hovered.

Rose rooted in her bag.

'I know it's supposed to be my treat but I've left my friggin' card in my purse in the locker at school. Would you take care of it? It's not that much anyway,' Rose said.

Martin said nothing. He took out cash and put it on top of the bill.

'Thank you Sir, I'll bring your change.'

'Keep it,' Martin said.

'No no,' Rose said, 'it must be the correct percentage, bring it back and we'll leave you something, dear.'

Krystyna nodded and left. Martin felt totally humiliated but said nothing. It was the condescending "dear" that had really got to him. He was now beyond even trying to remember the "good" times. Krystyna came back with the silver plate with the change on it. Rose examined the bill, did a quick mental calculation, took away most of the cash, left the minimum.

'Enjoy the rest of your evening,' Krystyna said as it was formulaic of her to say.

'Thank you,' Martin nodded.

'I'm going on ahead, I want to catch the last of that science series on BBC, see you at home,' Rose said as she walked past him to the door. Krystyna began clearing the table. Martin took some cash from his pocket and went to give it to her. She looked at him, shook her head, took a small slip of white paper from her pocket, put it on top of the coins, closed his hand over them and walked away. Martin emptied

the contents into his pocket and left. It was only when he sat in his car that he took out the slip of paper and opened it. On it was a mobile telephone number. What was happening? Krystyna had witnessed his humiliation and was ... what? He decided to phone her but not yet. He waited until after he got his wife's car door fixed. Then two weeks later he rang.

'Krystyna speaking,' her voice, gentle.

'Hel-hell-hello,' Martin managed then waited hoping she would recognise him.

'Yes?'

She didn't appear to know him. He sank. Then he gathered a breath.

'I was in Flanagan's some time back, with my wife, celebrating my birthday and you gave me this number when I was leaving.'

'Yes yes, I remember now.'

He waited for her to speak further but she didn't

'Are ye busy in Flanagan's tonight?'

'I don't work at Flanagan's now. I've moved.'

'Oh.'

'I wanted to give you some hope, ok?'

'Some hope?'

There was silence only it wasn't really. Krystyna was there in that silence. Nothing more he could say. He hung up. Thirty minutes later he was outside Flanagan's looking in the window. There was no sign of Krystyna. So she was gone. She was gone but yes, she had planted some hope. He turned away and looked into the harbour. The two swans were back, he remembered that swans mate for life. The swans were relaxed and happy, taking bits of bread a little girl was throwing in.

**Neil Donnelly ©**

**Neil Donnelly is from Tullamore, County Offaly and his best known works are his plays 'Upstarts', 'The Silver Dollar Boys' and 'The Duty Master'.**



## From Mullahoran to the Royal Albert Hall...

### A MUSICAL ODYSSEY FOR LONGFORD COUNTY CHOIR

These are exciting times for the members of Longford County Choir as they rehearse and prepare for their first ever performance in the Royal Albert Hall London.

The well known sixty member choir is nothing if not versatile as only a few weeks ago they sang in the parish church in Mullahoran to help raise funds for the church maintenance fund. They followed that by singing in the pro-Cathedral Dublin with the world famous Palestrina Choir under the baton of Choral Director, Bláinid Murphy who co-incidentally, was the first Choral Director of the Longford County Choir. The next step in their musical odyssey will happen on Sunday 12th July when they sing as part of a massed choir in the Royal Albert Hall London.

The programme for the night's performance will include a number of orchestral pieces followed by the combined choirs from Ireland and the U.K. singing the One Hundredth Psalm by Vaughan Williams; and the highpoint of the night will be a performance by approximately four hundred choristers of the Rutter Requiem, conducted by the composer. John Rutter is one of the greatest living composers of both classical and sacred music, so to get to sing his music as part of a massed choir in the iconic setting of the Royal Albert Hall is a fantastic experience, but to get to rehearse with and sing for the maestro in person, is surely the high point in the career of any serious choral singer.

The Longford County Choir has been established since 2001 and while most of its members are from Longford, it also draws members from the four surrounding counties. The Choir makes a tremendous contribution to community life in Longford as it is very generous with its time and talents, and is always available to perform at community events and for local charities. At this point the annual Christmas Concert by Longford County Choir in St. Mel's Cathedral is one of the highlights of Longford's cultural calendar.

While performing in front of more than a thousand people in the Royal Albert Hall is a daunting task at the best of times, the Longford County Choir will take the experience in its stride as –at this point – it has performed in diverse venues from Granard to Krakow, and from Ballymahon to Vienna and perhaps, the greatest test of all for a choir, they have performed and competed in Choral Festivals in the home of choral singing - Wales.

Good luck, Longford County Choir.

# FilmOffaly and Filmbase 2009 Award

Recently FilmOffaly, Offaly's Film Commission in partnership with Filmbase, announced a new award for a film to be shot on location in Offaly.

With €8,000 up for grabs, free location insurance, reduction on editing and equipment, and a premier at Tullamore Omniplex, the package proved extremely enticing, attracting 110 scripts entries.

Two professional script readers were employed to whittle it down to a shortlist of 8. Alan Fitzpatrick and Declan Recks made the final decision, and after much deliberation chose a script by Domhnall Gleeson.

The short film is a dark comedy, telling the story of two guards on duty in Offaly. The film will be shot on location in Offaly this summer. Chairperson of FilmOffaly, Cllr. Marcella Corcoran Kennedy says, "We are delighted with the response and the outcome of this initiative."

Writer and Director, Domhnall Gleeson is a very experienced actor. He has played major roles in stage productions such as Martin McDonagh's 'The Lieutenant of Inishmore' and Mamet's 'American Buffalo'. Roles in screen productions such as 'Six Shooter' and two Harry Potter films, also provided him with extensive film experience.

The film will be produced by El Zorrero Films who also produced several short fictions and documentaries with the Irish Film Board and French-German broadcaster ARTE. They also produced various projects for RTE and TG4. Their documentaries include 'Visiting Day'; and 'God and Napoleon', won the Jury Prize at the 2008 Stranger Than Fiction documentary festival.

# HILLTOWN NEW MUSIC FESTIVAL

**Saturday 18th & Sunday 19th July 2009**  
Castlepollard, Co. Westmeath

An exciting addition to the music scene in Ireland is the Hilltown Festival of New Music which takes place this year on the weekend of Saturday 18 & Sunday 19 July.

Hilltown House in Castlepollard Co Westmeath is hosting the Festival which will be attended by Irish and international composers and performers of New Music. The Festival brings to the Midlands an array of world class talent.

A series of six concerts will take place over the two day festival, held in the unique setting of the Nugent Castle, in

the grounds of the eighteenth century house. Other events include performance and composition workshops, master-classes, and sonic and audio-visual installations. For those unfamiliar with the genre, there will be introductory talks and a chance to interact with the performers.

A number of educational events will be run in tandem with the festival programme including childrens' workshops.

Highlights of the programme include works and performances by renowned Romanian composers Dan Dediu and Diana Rotaru; New York composer Henry Vega; Irish composer Gráinne Mulvey and midlands composer Nicholas Ward, who is based in Northern Ireland.

Coming from Germany are Barbara Lüneburg and Burkhard Friederich who are founding members and artistic directors of the acclaimed German Ensemble Intégrales. Romanian flautist Ana Chifu, Israeli singer Ana Spiegel and the Dublin based electro-acoustic ensemble EAR will also attend.

"Music, like all the arts, needs to keep reinventing itself if it is to fully engage with our own generation. Events like the Hilltown Festival which bring together and mix the creative talent from Ireland and the rest of the world, let us see and hear just how energising and entertaining new work can be". (Fionnuala Cawkill, Festival Director.)

The weekend festival will attract not just lovers of New Music, but also those who just fancy a day in the country. Hilltown House is less than two hours drive from Dublin and the festival is well signposted from Oldcastle and Castlepollard. Some may like to bring a picnic, although a local café will set up shop on the grounds. Ample parking is available on site.

The festival is sponsored by The Arts Council, Westmeath County Council and Westmeath VEC. A small number of tickets will be available on the day. For booking and further information on the festival programme, log on to [www.hilltown.ie](http://www.hilltown.ie).

**Day Tickets €15**  
**Festival Pass €25**  
**Camping Facilities available**

**HILLTOWN**

● ABOUT ● NEW MUSIC FESTIVAL ● EVENTS ● LOCATION ● CONTACT ●

PROGRAMME  
ARTISTS  
CALL FOR WORK  
BUY TICKETS

**HILLTOWN NEW MUSIC FESTIVAL**  
Saturday 18th & Sunday 19th July 2009  
Castlepollard, Co. Westmeath, Ireland

International weekend festival of contemporary music, song and mixed installations.  
Six evenings, workshops and talks around the medieval castle  
deep in the grounds of Hilltown House.

Featured composers and performers include: Dan Dediu (Romania), Barbara Lüneburg (Germany), Shoko Chikami (Japan), Henry Vega (USA), Dušanović (Croatia), Axel Springer (Israel), Ana Spiegel (Israel), Ana Chifu (Romania), Rina Duda (Romania), Yoko Lee (Korea), Gráinne Mulvey (Ireland), Joe O'Connell (Ireland), Anthony Kelly & David Scully (Ireland), Eyal Sivan (Israel), Jani Sykora (Finland), Wylie Dugley (UK), Laila Pele (UK), Anthony Carbone (UK)

Day Tickets €15 Euro  
Festival Pass €25 Euro  
Camping Facilities available

For maps, buses to site and transport, go to the [location](#) page for more information

# MAD PRIDE IRELAND in PORTLAOISE on 12th JULY 2009

Our Gifts – Art Music Inventiveness Creativity Eccentricity Literature

Normality of Madness A Word Stolen Hope and Dignity Without Stigma Our Future

## What is Mad Pride about?

Mad Pride is about fun, community, family and facing up to the fact that Mental Illness does not have to be a lonely or hopeless affair. We want to highlight the normality of Madness to the wider community in an effort to break down barriers and open minds to the need to address one of the country's hidden problems.

## What does Mad Pride do?

We believe that the best way to promote understanding of the issues surrounding mental health is to engage the community through active participation in a fun environment. We do that by hosting family events that are inclusive, fun and suitable for children, teenagers, adults and families.

These events do not bombard people with pamphlets, extolling the virtues of one approach over another. Rather they show the world that madness is an everyday occurrence that affects us all and can be dealt with openly, lovingly and without stigma.

## What does a Mad Pride event consist of?

We host events with diverse programmes that are tailored to suit the local community. Every Mad Pride event has a good deal of silliness, ridiculousness, colour and fun as well as:

- Music
- Street Theatre Shows
- Games
- Market Area
- Information Areas

Although each event has the same framework, we use a mixture of local, national and international acts in our programme

We are again inviting you to join us in celebrating of the normality of madness.

Mad Pride Ireland is about the dismantling of stigma through simple engagement of community as a whole around the normality of madness.

Laughter, music, fun and family picnics are our central mission, in the centre of our city, in the centre of our community.

Madness is a word, a word stolen from us and turned into something to be feared, and we want the word back.

With unconditional love we can give hope, and with hope you can have dignity, with dignity you can walk with confidence towards an expanding future.

In these times of economic hardship, we all need a sense of hope and dignity as we have never needed it before. Mad Pride family fun days are an opportunity offered to you to come together and rediscover ourselves as a loving, all embracing community.

It is time to dispel the myths.

We give so many great gifts to society – literature; art; music; sensitivity; eccentricities; inventiveness; - yet we are feared! Let us begin to look at the POSITIVE GIFTS we bring to you. It is time to dispel the myths!

From fear comes ignorance and prejudice, from that stigma, you as members of the wider society have a duty to change how you see us; we will help you change at Mad Pride Family Fun Day, please support us and it is FREE!!

We are expanding, we have been invited by Junior Minister of Health, Mr John Moloney TD, to take Mad Pride to Portlaoise, and preparations are in place, date 12th July. Watch this space. [www.goldfish.ie](http://www.goldfish.ie)

Normality of Madness A Word Stolen Hope and Dignity Without Stigma Our Future

# NEW COMMUNITY ARTS INITIATIVE FOR LONGFORD

# LONGFORD C.A.N.

"Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community; to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and benefits"

This Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that everyone is entitled to access and participate in the Arts.

In many circles there is a perception that the arts are only for a select few - that only the élite are entitled to access the arts, and only a select and gifted few have the ability to produce art. This is not the case. Everyone is an artist; everyone is indeed essentially creative and has something valuable to contribute to society.

As well as being a human right, creative activity also delivers tangible benefits to the participants. Those taking part in the arts, report that they feel much more alive; have increased levels of self esteem; improved communication and some experience improvements in their quality of life.

Community Arts Projects have been used to address issues such as: social exclusion; reconciliation; challenge stereotypes; facilitate reconciliation and promote communication. Those taking part in Community Arts are able to discuss, explore and challenge the arts in a relaxed, fun and non-threatening environment. Participants also acquire an abundance of skills, ranging from new technical expertise to experience in all aspects of production. Community Arts Projects often give groups the confidence to go on to tackle other issues, and this has proved a very effective way of addressing weak

community infrastructure.

All this said and done, in mainstream arts, the artistic product; that is the finished painting, the final performance or the completed poem is all that matters. However, in the Community Arts the process of participation is just as important. It is during this process that participants explore their creative side with others, discuss their experiences and acquire new skills.

Longford Town and County badly need more Community Art Initiatives, Longford Community Arts Network will no doubt help to remedy this.

Meetings will be held regularly to bring together members of the community who would be interested in sharing their skills or learning new ones. We hope to set up poetry, music, drama and art groups that would help alleviate the isolation that some people can experience whilst creating their chosen art-form. The Arts are for everyone and the facility should be made for people of all ages; either as a hobby or whether you wish to become more professional in the arts, it is good to meet with like-minded folk - from these meetings only great things can be accomplished.

A meeting will be held in the back room of John Brown's bar on the first Tuesday of the month, to set up the LONGFORD COMMUNITY ARTS NETWORK. This meeting will commence at 8pm-10pm, and members of the local community interested in art, poetry, music and theatre are invited wholeheartedly to attend and express their interests and goals!

CONTACT can be made to LCAN Co-ordinator, Clare Kelly at 087-2263423

Offaly County Council, Arts Office, as part of the Bealtaine festival, published a book called Open Doors, a collection of stories, memories and poems by over 40 contributors from across the county. The contributors are all over 55, and the majority of the writers put pen to paper for the first time.

The book, compiled and edited by Caroline Barry and Neil Richardson, is a result of a public invitation for entries in March. Caroline says,

"We are gob smacked! There is no other way to phrase it. The quality of writing that we have been given to edit for this anthology has impressed us greatly. After years of hosting creative writing workshops and seeing

## OPEN DOORS

how difficult people find it to write a good story, it was amazing to receive such excellent work, written with apparent ease, beautifully crafted and straight forward – an engaging text that is both captivating and poignant, wonderfully paced and quirkily described. These stories are quite literally priceless, not least because they are beautifully and simply written, but because they capture lost things. And by telling us of times gone by, of the everyday detail that has now vanished, of how people shared and cared and tormented each other, of old sayings and old rituals, these writers



have preserved for posterity a glimmer of another world."

Open Doors is available from Offaly County Council, Arts Office please contact 057 9357400

# Ballinahown Irish Designer Craft Village

## Core Crafted Design and Celtic Roots Studio, Ballinahown



Ballinahown boasts two beautiful craft shops - Core Crafted Design, and Celtic Roots Studio. This Centre for Craft, a tranquil award winning village, located ten minutes from Athlone and near the ancient monastic college of Clonmacnoise, is fast becoming a recognised centre of excellence for craft in the midlands. Visitors can browse in both studios and relax in the café located at Core.

Core, which opened its doors in June 2008, is merely the next stage in a perpetual evolution of ideas, creativity and spirituality. It is fitting that Core Crafted Design is itself housed in an old schoolhouse. The vintage styles of the building merge easily with the contemporary design of the new outlet, to create an apt showcase for the largest selection of craft designers, artists, and creatives in the midlands. The outlet is also spearheading the growth of craft and design in the area by facilitating makers in showcasing their designs of locally produced crafts, including: ceramics; jewellery; paintings; glasswork; paper; woodwork; textiles; metalwork while also arranging

demonstrations and craft classes for those interested in exploring their creative talents.

For more information on Core and it's ongoing activities visit [www.corecrafteddesign.com](http://www.corecrafteddesign.com)

### Celtic Roots Studio

Celtic Roots Workshop was established in association with Bord na Mona in 1991, creating sculptures and gifts in bogwood. In 1998, Helen Conneely with the other craft people, further developed the concept to become a self-sustaining venture in its own right. Helen opened a gallery operation in Ballinahown at this time to showcase and market Celtic Roots' exquisite product range. The studio is one of Ireland's leading craft businesses, it has built a strong reputation in corporate, retail and overseas markets. Celtic Roots Studio creates carvings in bog oak and bog yew, ancient materials that date back to over five thousand years. A key source of inspiration is the two thousand hectares of cutaway bog land in Lough Boora, Co. Offaly which

has been re-flooded, and has now become a natural home from Irish birds at risk. These birds: snipe; lapwing; partridge; curlews; corncrakes are the key carvings found in the Celtic Roots portfolio.

An important part of the business is corporate commissions. Irish corporate clients include all the major financial houses, government departments, and Irish top one hundred companies. Recipients of Celtic Roots designs have included President Sarcozy, President Bush and Senator Edward Kennedy.

The obvious commitment of Helen and her team to excellence of craft making and to quality of life in a rural community has been positive in the locality. She has worked progressively to raise the profile of the Offaly Westmeath Region and of emerging craft artists in the area.

The Celtic Roots Studio has brought life and employment into the tiny village of Ballinahown, and has reinforced the village's image as a location of craft excellence in the midlands. For more information on Celtic Roots Studio visit [www.celticrootsstudio.ie](http://www.celticrootsstudio.ie)



# 10 YEARS OF INSPIRATIONAL CREATIVITY AT THE DUNAMAISE ARTS CENTRE



The Dunamaisé Arts Centre based in Portlaoise, is celebrating its 10th anniversary this year and, over the last decade it has successfully and consistently provided the people of Laois and beyond with the chance to experience top class arts events. The centre is now a key part of the social and cultural landscape of County Laois and has received much acclaim, not only from the general public and its loyal customers, but from other venues and touring companies.

There have been many highlights over the last ten years. The Dunamaisé has presented, and will continue to present, the best in local, national and international theatre, including acclaimed shows by Druid, Rough Magic and Calypso Theatre Companies. In October 2008, the Centre hosted a most coveted performance of *Waiting for Godot* by the Gate Theatre. The Dunamaisé was delighted to bring Tumble Circus to Portlaoise Town Plaza last May, and to open its doors for two Open Days with workshops, facepainting, balloon making, and performances by Laois School of Music and Laois Youth Theatre in May and June.

Every style and genre of music has been featured at the Dunamaisé Arts Centre, from highbrow classical to folk, country and western, jazz and pop, ranging from: Finbar Wright; RTÉ National Symphony & Concert Orchestras to Christy Moore; Harlem Gospel Choir; Sharon Shannon; Paul Brady to Christie Hennessy; Jimmy McCarthy; Jack L; Liam Clancy to the great jazz guitarist, Louis Stewart, to name but a few.

The Dunamaisé Arts Centre has played host to the Opera Theatre Company and Opera UK, Ballet Ireland, Rex Levitates Dance Company and The Independent Ballet Wales as well as various international dance acts.

A very strong programme of Irish and international films are also shown, many of which are award winning, in conjunction with Access Cinema and the Irish Film Institute on an ongoing basis.

Visual Arts form a very important part of the Dunamaisé Arts Centre's organisation. Some of the best known artists in Ireland and all over the world, have exhibited at the centre, to name but a few: Tony O'Malley; David King; Bernadette Madden; Robert Ballagh (IMMA); Gemma Guihan; Jock Nichol and Ulrich Vogl.

This summer will see: free exhibitions; the best of movies twice a day; uplifting and very funny theatre; a new Saturday club for families; plenty of workshops for the kids and the coolest music in Summer Sounds; as well as an illustrious birthday party in the form of a Gala Ball, featuring the show *Faulty Towers...the Dining Experience*.



Tumble Circus at the Portlaois Town Plaza last May

A new initiative being brought on board this summer is a second screening of its films, at 10.00am on Wednesdays. A comprehensive series of workshops and The Treehouse Club, a Saturday Club for families with children under 6, will also feature in the summer programme.

There's a great line-up of Summer Sounds concerts this year, from Ireland's newest singer/ songwriter (Aoife Corcoran) to legends of the Irish folk scene, Scullion. The Dunamaisé is delighted to be honouring, as part of its 10th anniversary celebrations, Laois's home-grown poet of distinction, Pat Boran. The Dunamaisé will also host part of the Magnet Festival in which Liam O'Maonlaó, Michael English and Declan O'Rourke play at the arts centre over the August Bank Holiday weekend.

For the future, the Dunamaisé Arts Centre hopes that it will be an island to which you can come, whether it's for a cup of coffee in Café Latte, a quiet time in the gallery or a great night of entertainment in the auditorium. The Dunamaisé will continue to be a wonderful resource for the people of Laois.

For further information about the Dunamaisé Arts Centre or its programme, see [www.dunamaisé.ie](http://www.dunamaisé.ie)

# SYNERGY & LIGHT

## - The Brawny Dance Project Athlone

This article is presented as three reflections by the two artists and mentor involved

### Ríonach Ní Néill (mentor)

Public art projects have played a role in reflecting, and to a degree, shaping, communities' identities and sense of place. Visual arts and particularly sculpture have been the predominant mediums for these representations, so it is significant that, when the opportunity to engage in a public art project arose, the residents of the Brawny Estate in Athlone, chose dance and drama with young people as their medium. Sculptural works, as well as having a long public monument tradition, have had a 'value for money' edge, being seen as more tangible, visible, and permanent. The Brawny residents' decision recognises broader interpretations of the legacy, lifespan, indeed of the borders of an artwork. In an action-based artwork, the process of creation is as significant as the completed piece.

Having chosen young people as their ambassadors, the local community has recognised their artistic expression as representative and significant, and given voice and validity to a less-heard section of the public. While public art involving young people does have an educational aspect – and in the absence of a public system of dance education in Ireland such projects fill a gap – this is not the primary purpose, and the young artists are not seen as substitutes for trained performers. With the young people as both subjects and objects of the work, the artist has the challenge of providing them with the tools for reflection and self-expression – in this case aiding their physical vocabularies – creating a framework within which the



young artists determine their own expression, and a context within which this can be experienced.

The artists, Jeanine and Suzanne, have worked with the young people since 2007, and this, the second phase of the project, is building towards a performance during the summer. The process is being documented on [www.vibrate.ie](http://www.vibrate.ie), revealing the development stages and decision-making involved. This, as well as a performance dvd and publication, will be the project's artefacts, but perhaps the most significant, and longlasting monument will live in the minds and bodies of the young artists and their audience.



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# Synergy Connections:

## A New Vision on Teaching Dance

### Jeannine Maguire-Lowry (artist)

I have been teaching for over twenty years and usually am impressed at how well my students do after their training. It was a year ago when I met the group of students in the Brawny Estate, Athlone, Co. Westmeath. I was asked to teach them dance. Over the next seven months of teaching the children, we all gained a trust of one another and a respect of each other that has brought us to our next phase of our interaction.

We are now embarking on a new arts project that incorporates two teachers, Suzanne Hogan and myself. I am the choreographer and Suzanne is the visual artist (among many other talents she has to offer.)

Our initial goal was to give the students a multi-disciplinary workshop that would allow each of them to express themselves in whatever way suits them best. We have since realised we are changing the paradigm, and using the arts out of their own context to gain a stronger sense of each discipline.

Through honest conversations, we have built trust and respect within our group and that is the foundation upon which we began our artistic vision. This project offers so much more than a single disciplinary training. I have seen the most beautiful, heartfelt dancing coming from this group of students who range in age from four to fifteen, and include boys and girls. It is most gratifying to see children who believe in themselves so much that they take what little steps you give them and begin to fly.

### Suzanne Hogan (artist)

I have worked solidly as an artist in the field of drama for the last five years, and during this time I have had the opportunity to observe first hand the value of the arts within communities, and how policy and funding are vital to encouraging growth and cohesion within society and culture.

Recently, I have chosen to move disciplines, into dance and visual arts, to focus on a more multidisciplinary, emotive approach to performance; working first with Niamh Condron and Vibrate Dance Festival, and now with the gifted and divine Jeannine Maguire-Lowry. Along with these two remarkable women, I also, in conjunction with this project, have the great honour of working with the vision and grace of dancer Ríonach Ní Néill.

Last year, Jeannine Maguire-Lowry and myself were asked to work with a group of children from the Brawny Estate in Athlone, under the Per Cent for Arts Scheme. What ensued were two projects – one centred on dance, the other around drama. Both projects adhered to a fairly strict format, with very little room for an organic approach to art. Needless to say, there were battles and much joy and creative clashes along the path to stardom!

So when the opportunity presented itself to continue the Brawny Estate project, a youth group project morphed itself into a public art platform, with a fresh approach to expression and creativity, both for the artists involved (Jeannine and myself) and the participants themselves.



The Project, titled “Synergy & Light”, is a multidisciplinary, interactive performance co-created by the artists, the process and the participants. It utilises the medium of dance, combined with visual arts, story telling and music. It is as much a legacy for the artists, as it is for the participants. Through the inception, planning and development of this project, my own desires as an artist have polarised as painter, dancer and soul guide. An explosion of passion and expression has been ignited by the process, an untold gift for any artist.

The goal of “Synergy & Light” is the expression of individual creativity through direct contact with the vibrant, emotional, authentic self in order to create, very naturally, a cohesive living piece of public art, and, in the process, enrich the soul. Already the evidence is there, we have watched these children evolve emotionally, mentally and socially since first meeting them in 2008. It is with absolute certainty, that an alchemical process is at work in Athlone, a process by which any lead in the soul is transformed to gold and diamonds, splaying rainbows of light across community and individual experience.

**For further information and to follow the making of this artwork visit [www.vibrate.ie](http://www.vibrate.ie)**

# ANAM BEO

A new arts  
organisation in Offaly

The Offaly based arts in health project, Anam Beo, which has been under the umbrella of Offaly County Council since 2005, will this year become an independent arts organisation.

The aim of this is to expand the work of the group into other centres and other regions, and to allow some diversification of projects and funding to develop. The core aims of the project remain the same, to provide non-judgemental process led art sessions in health settings, where

taking part is more important than the end product. The focus of the group over the next year is to continue creative workshops with participants, create a website as a support and resource network, and to promote best practice and source other potential partners to aid development of new participant groups.

Anam Beo has secured independent funding from The Arts Council to work with artist, Michael Fortune later in the year. To contact the group, please email [juliespollen@gmail.com](mailto:juliespollen@gmail.com)



## Legitimate Bodies Pinocchio

in conjunction with Birr Boys Primary

“Once upon a time, there was...” and the resounding “A GIANT!” came from 28 enthusiastic boys. But no, not a giant, not a princess... it was a puppet named Patrick, no David Beckham, no it was PINOCCHIO! The actors and audience of children of all ages shouted corrections to the narrator and everyone became part of the magic at once.

Defly changing jackets and roles as Gepetto, Stromboli, the puppet master and narrator, actor Myles Breen guided the boys through an amazing adventure featuring the world's tallest puppet, Nick Bryson. Despite the height disadvantage, with clever choreography, he made a very credible little puppet boy. The preparation for

this show was evident, the boys knew their parts very well.

The basic black of the staging and the dress of the boys provided a calm backdrop for the quick colourful changes of accessories to hint at the various locations. School, puppet theatre, and pleasure island, where no one ever tells you to stop anything, including fighting.

Approaching 28 boys with the idea of dancing is much like lion taming. Legitimate Bodies found a hook, a boy's story, which drew them in.

The project was brought about by Maureen De Forge and Legitimate Bodies Dance Company in collaboration with Birr Boys School, with support from Offaly County Council Arts Office, Birr Theatre and Arts Centre, The Arts Council, Lions Club and St Brendan's Boys National School.

Rebecca Armstrong

Nick Bryson and Myles Breen  
performing in Pinocchio  
Photo by  
Clare Dunne



## GREEN SHOOTS OF TRADITIONAL MUSIC REVIVAL IN LONFORD

While County Longford has always produced its fair share of accomplished traditional musicians and, in some cases exemplary traditional musicians, it is fair to say the quality of the musicianship has not always been reflected in the size of the local audience for trad music. Since the showband era of the sixties and seventies, Country and Irish and Country and Western have been the pre-dominant popular music forms.

A distinct change in popular musical tastes and participation has become apparent with the re-emergence of a strong traditional music scene in Longford. The Johnny Keenan Banjo Festival in Longford town has become an established event in the national music calendar. The festival has always given a prominent profile to traditional music and the traditional banjo in particular. Some years ago, Longford was one of the few counties in Ireland that didn't have a county Fleadh Ceoil, now the County Fleadh is one of the major music events of the year. This year's three day event was held in Edgeworthstown and attracted hundreds of traditional music lovers from the midlands and border counties, to enjoy a huge array of excellent music, song and dance. In addition to the musical element, the ancient art of The Seanchaí was evident with story tellers from throughout the region, regaling young and old alike with stories true and "not so true" from the past and present. An interesting addition to this year's Fleadh Ceoil Contae Longfoirt was the programming of a comhrá competition for Irish conversationalists.

A very welcome support for the future development of traditional music in Longford has been the establishment of the Saturday Music Club in Edgeworthstown. The brainchild of local traditional music organiser, Pauline Flood, the Music Club runs all day every Saturday, and the numbers participating are such that activities have to be organised in three different locations: The Pavilion on the Green; The Old School House; and the Mostrim Arms. The focus of the Saturday Music Club is children and young musicians, and throughout the day, they learn to play: guitar; banjo; mandolin; whistle; piano; accordion; and percussion in addition to singing classes. The Saturday Music Club has already provided the catalyst for the development of three youth ceili bands at under twelve, under fifteen and under eighteen levels.

In light of these and other local developments, traditional music appears to be making a strong come back in Longford.

Anyone interested in participating in The Saturday Music Club should contact Pauline Flood at 086 - 1513152.

## Visual Arts at Birr Vintage Week

Eilís Lavelle, the visual arts curator for the second year, has invited The Good Hatchery to co-curate the selection of artists and venues to devise a strong programme of visual arts with a focus on events such as artists' talks and screenings, bringing audiences together to experience the work. Carl Giffney and Ruth Lyons, based outside Daingean Co. Offaly, run the artist-led initiative The Good Hatchery. Their recent collaborative exhibition at Monster Truck Gallery, is called 'Iridescence A'. Overall there will be fewer artists spread across more venues, concentrating the art trail in the town centre. One artist to feature is James Merrigan. His art practice is to focus on the idea of the event, and how the audience capture or read it. We are hoping to site some of his work in a shop on Birr Main Street. Check the Festival website for further details. [www.birrvintageweek.com](http://www.birrvintageweek.com)



## 41st Annual Birr Vintage Week & Arts Festival

14 - 21 August 2009

From Friday 14th to Friday 21st August 2009, the town of Birr will welcome locals and visitors, old friends and new to enjoy the 41st Birr Vintage Week & Arts Festival.

A week long Visual Arts Trail along with a number of independent exhibitions showcasing local & visiting, professional & amateur artists through a range of media, is an integral part of the Festival.

Other highlights of the Festival include: the Vintage Parade; 40th Annual Antique & Fine Art Fair; Free Children's Events and the Camcor Capers

The 41st Annual Birr Vintage Week & Arts Festival promises to be an exciting and vibrant festival, inspiring participation & enjoyment for everyone who makes the effort to come out & sample the events. With a dynamic mix of contemporary culture and vintage events, this is a unique festival. For further information on the Festival, please contact [info@birrvintageweek.com](mailto:info@birrvintageweek.com) or check out [www.birrvintageweek.com](http://www.birrvintageweek.com)



# From Munich

Artist Stefanie Brüning relocated to Dublin from Munich, where she had been living and working as an artist and university lecturer. She has just completed a hugely successful residency in Laois.

Funded by the Arts Office of Laois County Council, she worked in three schools on three different projects; CBS Secondary School Portlaoise, Gaelscoil Phortlaoise and Timahoe NS. Sculpture was the focus in all three schools. Clay was used in the CBS, wire in the Gaelscoil, and metal in Timahoe NS.

## CBS SECONDARY PORTLAOISE

The CBS was more focussed on the single creations worked on independently of each other, whereas in Timahoe and in the Gaelscoil, the work process was aimed at a final group product- a mutual creation for a wall in each school where every piece had an important place within a composition. In the CBS, Stefanie worked with a group of seven boys and their art teacher, Willie Quinlan.

According to Stefanie, "The boys were very focussed, working intensely and with impressive concentration on their sculptors."

## GAELSCOIL PHORTLAOISE

Scríobh muinteoir, Siobhán Uí Chuinn, litir chuig Muireann Ní Chonaill, an Oifigeach Ealaíne i gComhairle Chontae Laoise ag iarraidh ealaíontóir chun cabhrú linn na spásanna folamha inár bhfoirgneamh nua a líonadh. Ar an dea-uair dúinn sheol Muireann, Stefanie Brüning chugainn. As an Ghearmáin ó dhúchas í Stefanie agus bhí sé soléir dúinn anseo i nGaelscoil Phortlaoise gurb ealaíontóir den scoth í.

Labhair sí le daltaí rang a sé faoin sórt tionscnamh ba mhaith leo a dhéanamh, agus faoin gcinéal meán ba mhian leo a usáid. Mhol sí dóibh triail a bhaint as sreang a usáid mar mhéan agus thaispeáin sí seó sleamhnáin dóibh faoi obair Alexander Calder- ealaíontóir cáiliúil a d'oibrigh le sreang agus miotal mar mhéain. Spreag sé sin iad chun rudaí bunúsacha a dhéanamh as an sreanga agus d'fhoghlaim siad conas an sreang a láimhséail. Tar éis tamaill, bhí níos múinín acu iontu féin anois chun tús a chur le tionscnamh níos dáiríre.

Sa deireadh thiar thall bheartaigh siad ar théama na farraige agus rinneadh taighde ar an t-idirlíon faoin gcinéal créatúr a roghnóidís. I gceann tamaill bhí créatúir mar smugairlí róin, capaill farraige, éisc coimhthíocha cosúil le "manta-rays" agus a leithéid cruthaithe acu. Thosaigh siad le cinn déthoiseach



ach de réir a chéile déirigh siad níos cróga agus chruthaigh siad cinn tríthoiseach. Faoi stiúr Stefanie, d'usáid siad sreang daite maraon le sreang airgead. An t-am go léir, bhí Stefanie ag cabhrú leo agus ag tabhairt moladh dóibh faoin modh oibre is fearr. Réitigh sí go hiontach leo agus siadsan léi. Le cabhair ó Stefanie, chroch na daltaí a gcuid oibre ar bhalla mór taobh amuigh den rang. Táimid uilig fíor bhróidiúil as an dtaispeántas sin. Fuair siad deis bheith ag obair le cré ar feadh tamaillín chomh maith. Dhearaigh siad deilbhíní bunaithe ar an miotal Gréagach faoi Daphne agus Apollo. Thug siad faoi ndeara na difríochtaí idir sreang agus cré a bheith á láimhséail acu.

Gan amhras, bhain daltaí rang a sé na Gaelscoile an-taitneamh as an obair go léir agus d'fhoghlaim siad an t-uafás ón muinteoir ionspioráidiúil, gealgháireach a bhí acu. Ní bheidh maidine Dé Luain mar an gcéanna do daltaí rang a sé na Gaelscoile, gan cnag ar an doras ag leath uair tar éis a naoi ó Stefanie!

Brádan Feasa

Timahoe NS

# to Portlaoise...

## An artist-in-schools programme

Excitement was mounting at Timahoe NS for weeks as final preparations were being made for the unveiling of "Brádan Feasa" -the culmination of an arts project where school, county council, community and local businesses worked together with hugely successful results. Gaye Tanham from The Arts Council performed the official unveiling on Monday June 15 to a very receptive audience.

Following a request made to the Arts Office by Arts Co-ordinator, Martina Mulhall, Muireann Ní Chonaill came on board with funding for artist, Stefanie Brüning. In turn Timahoe NS Parents' Council pledged their support as did local businessmen, John Culliton (TED) and Tim Carew (TSI Flowmeters). Joe Cahill, Modern Ironworks Ltd in Rathdowney, also gave freely of his time and expertise.

The residency began 18 months ago. The only request made by the school was to create an art piece for the newly built school extension. Timahoe collectively decided "An Brádan Feasa" (The Salmon of Knowledge) was the perfect name for the art piece. Then Stefanie worked at Modern Ironworks Ltd Rathdowney. "Joe Cahill was brilliant", said Stefanie. "Without him this project could never have happened."

After Rathdowney, Stefanie moved back to Timahoe and worked in John Culliton's workshop (TED – Timahoe Engineering and Design). There she put the finishing touches to each piece as John welded on the mounting brackets.

Then came the coating at Carlow Coatings to prevent rusting. "John was incredibly patient", said Stefanie. "So generous with his time, and so inventive with techniques".

"It is an eye-catching, thought provoking piece of sculpture", said Principal, Enda Hickey.

Arts Officer, Muireann Ní Chonaill said, "It is fortuitous that Stefanie Brüning came to the attention of the Laois Arts Office, and that we were in a position to engage an artist of her calibre in our arts in education programme. During her residency with us she worked in three schools.

The end result in Timahoe School is particularly thrilling. It took a lot of courage to embark on such an ambitious project using those materials, showing her expertise and vision in relaying this complex work to the children"



## OFFALY HULLABALOO!

**The 3rd Offaly Hullabaloo! The midlands only arts festival dedicated to children will take place during the autumn midterm break, October 28 to 31, with workshops, performances and Hallowe'en bedlam! Aimed at ages 0 to 12, plenty for the parents to enjoy too, there will be around 30 different workshops which will cater for over 500 children. Workshops and performances include music, dance, storytelling, percussion, photography, creative writing, book clubs, cartoons and circus skills.**

The festival is organised by Birr Theatre and Arts Centre, Offaly County Arts Office, Birr

Castle, Birr Family Resource Centre, Birr Library and Tin Jug Studio, with events right throughout the town.

Workshops are expected to book out quickly, so parents are advised to contact the theatre soon. There are other events and performances where large numbers can be catered for, so nobody will be disappointed.

For a full programme of events contact Birr Theatre Box Office on 057 9122911 or Offaly County Arts Office on 057 9357400. A copy of the programme can also be downloaded on [www.birrtheatre.com](http://www.birrtheatre.com)



Photo: Andy Mason

# GOLDSMITH SUMMER SCHOOL STANDS THE TEST OF TIME

It seems that at this time of the year we are presented with news of the latest literary festival or literary heritage event on a weekly basis. Unfortunately many of these events disappear just as quickly, usually when the energy and enthusiasm of the well intended voluntary promoters dissipate. True, some literary events have been around for a long time such as The Yeats International Summer School or The Merriman Summer School but they are the honourable exception to the rule. One other notable exception is the Oliver Goldsmith International Summer School which celebrated its 25th anniversary recently.

The 25th anniversary marks the Goldsmith International Summer School as the third longest running event of its type in the country. Over those twenty five years, the Summer School has brought some of the world's leading academic experts on 18th century literature, as well as contemporary writers, journalists, politicians and a sprinkling of ambassadors and presidents to the small midlands town of Ballymahon.

The theme of this year's festival was; "Goldsmith: Poet, Playwright and Novelist" and guest speakers included: Professor Andrew Carpenter, the founding President of the 18th Century Ireland Society; Dr. Brian Arkins, Honorary President of the Classical Association of Ireland; Dr. Chris Wheatley, Professor of English at the Catholic University of America, Washington; award winning Poet, Noel Monahan and RTE Presenter, John Murray.

The Goldsmith Summer School programme represents an eclectic blend of serious, academic discussions on matters relating to Goldsmith and the 18th century along with exhibitions of contemporary art and musical performances that enliven the now famous social programme of the festival. An imaginative tie-in between Goldsmith, the 18th century writer and his literary successors in the midlands, is represented by the Children's Poetry Day at Pallas – Goldsmith's birthplace – when young finalists and winners of the Primary Schools Poetry Competition, read their poetry in the beautiful and evocative setting of the great man's birthplace. Congratulations to the committed and industrious committee, who have successfully steered this event for the past 25 years, and we look forward to at least 25 more years of pleasant, intellectual stimulation and cultural enrichment at the Goldsmith International Summer School.

## WALL

You are welcome to her. Mr. Refugee.  
No, not my country: just to this mike;  
We'd like to interview you. What's it like  
To want out, Mr Migrant Refugee?

Well, my good name is Migrant Refugee.  
I do not come here lightly, though you see  
I carry little luggage: just these scars  
And longings for the chance to drive a car.

Funnily enough, I was driven here  
By the sharpness of acute hunger pangs,  
Past the keen eyes of guards and cameras  
And the barbed racist jokes of razor wire.

I was driven here by a mad desire  
To earn in a month much the same amount  
As I earned at home in a sweated year.  
And you should also take into account

The will to leave what is dying behind  
And the desire to taste the melting pot  
And, as if all that were not quite a lot,  
The need to help out family and friends.

My name is Migrant Refugee. I flee.  
Political economy, you see  
Puts a spring in my step. Here I am free  
From despair. Your icy winter warms me.

Yes, I know what kind of world we live in.  
We live in a divided world: Berlin  
Again, except that now the wall has gone  
From East-to-West to North-to-South, along

New axes of hot/cold and rich/poor.  
This wall's so high that planes can't fly over.  
It hinges on passports: they are its gates.  
It bars multitudes, but all see through it.

This place is not Eden. It's not the Wall  
Dorf Astoria. I'll sweep its kitchens  
And I'll go round in circles to make ends  
Meet here, strong as a brick, my will a wall.

Kieran Furey, Longford

# Laois Youth Theatre Family Fun Day

## 6th June 2009

Over 60 members of Laois Youth Theatre aged between 7 and 17 participated in the Open House Day at the Dunamais Arts Centre on Saturday 6th June. The day was supported and funded by the Arts Office, Laois County Council. The family fun day celebrated and showcased the work of Laois Youth Theatre, and was part of the Dunamais Arts Centres' 10th Birthday celebrations.

The day was family oriented and set out to showcase the Youth Theatres' work and to encourage young people to join any one of Laois' Youth Theatres, based in Rathdowney, Mountrath, Portlaoise, Stradbally and Portarlinton.

### RETIRED

I love the morning

he rises first,  
quietly. I sleep on,

unaware. My alarm  
clock the clink of delph.  
Reluctant to leave

my well of dreams  
slowly I waken.  
Before I rearrange  
the pillows, sit up

he is back  
beneath the duvet.  
Together we sip tea,  
eat brown bread  
I baked

the day before,  
hear the news  
and weather;  
morning a chink  
between curtains.  
I know out there:

traffic lights turn red,  
pedestrians strain  
for the green man,  
children spill  
from school buses  
and someone else opens  
the classroom door.

**Breda Sullivan  
Longford**

The all-day event included stunning end of year performances from Rathdowney, Portarlinton, Mountrath and Stradbally Youth Theatres. Audiences in the auditorium were treated to four varied devised pieces. These pieces included a wacky play based on songs by Tom Chapin; a play about the precious gift of friendship; a spooky piece about the Spiddal Gaeltacht and a fishy tale about changing your luck.

The Youth Theatre co-ordinators, in between producing live theatre shows, entertained families with their storytelling skills in the Gallery space. Members of Portlaoise Youth Theatre busied themselves face-painting in the Dunamais foyer. The Arts Office co-ordinates and funds the Laois Youth Theatre countywide. The Arts Office considers Youth Theatre vital in nurturing and supporting drama and theatre for young people. It hopes that the high profile of the Family Fun Day encourages more young people to join Youth Theatre Groups in County Laois. They provide fundamental, artistic stepping stones to learning the craft of becoming professional directors, producers, actors and stage technicians. The shows and events were very well received. Many people came into the theatre to attend storytelling or workshops, and stayed to enjoy a show. Staff from the Arts Office was on hand to tell people about the day's events, and to answer any queries from the public on Laois Youth Theatre.



Stradbally Youth Theatre perform "Spooks in Spiddal"

Louise Donlon, manager of the Dunamais Arts Centre presented Achievement Certificates and a t-shirt to each of the Youth Theatre members. She congratulated them on their work, telling them that the skills they acquired in Youth Theatre will stay with them for life. Assistant Arts Officer, Bridie Keenan made a presentation to Louise, on behalf of the Arts Office and the Youth Theatres, to mark the Dunamais' 10th Birthday.

Muireann Ní Chonaill, Arts Officer, Laois County Council said, "We are very proud of the 5 Laois Youth Theatre Groups based around the county. The members, together with their co-ordinators and assistants, are a valuable resource within the county and their enthusiasm and passion for drama is something to behold."

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



Laois Youth Theatre members and staff with Louise Donlon, Manager of the Dunamais Arts Centre

# Welcome back Roesy!



Birr will extend a big welcome back to Roesy this summer when he exhibits at The Chestnut during Birr Vintage Week & Arts Festival (14 - 21 August), and plays at Birr Theatre & Arts Centre on Wednesday 19 August. Emma Nee Haslam, Birr Theatre Manager, asked Roesy recently about life in Amsterdam.

## How long are you living in Amsterdam and what have you been doing?

I'm living here in Amsterdam almost two years now. I've been writing and recording the next album, actually learning in more depth the recording process mainly through the help of another Irishman based out here, Barry Teehan who is from Shannonbridge, funny enough. Outside of that, I've been painting and exhibiting, learning some html to get independent with all my online stuff.

## You're a fantastic artist and musician, how do you divide your time between the two?

I really have to separate the two periods out as much as I can. I need time with each to get warmed up, on the visual or verbal thing. When I write now it's just different in some way, more focussed and silent. I'd say I cherish writing more now than I ever did when I was younger, plus now it really does keep me sane.

## You were in New York in March - how did that go?

It was an amazing trip. All these great things start happening to me. I have a publisher in the UK with a sister label in New York - that got me into the studio to record a track for a TV show, and through that I found a home to mix the next album in. I'm also going up to Connecticut to do some songwriting/recording workshops at

'The Hole in the Wall Gang Camp' which is a summer camp founded by Paul Newman for kids living with serious illnesses.

## What are you doing between now and returning to Birr, and what's the plan for the rest of the year?

Between now and August I'm exhibiting, mixing the album, going to Glastonbury and working on a book. I will be doing my homework for a trip to Memphis in Feb '10 to The Folk Alliance. Happy Christmas if I don't see you before then!!

Thanks so much Roesy - we're really looking forward to seeing you in August.

**Tickets for Roesy are available on [www.birrtheatre.com](http://www.birrtheatre.com) or call the box office on 057 9122911.**

## NOFIXEDABODE VISUAL TRAIL 2009 TULLAMORE

NoFixedAbode Visual Trail opens on Monday July 6th and continues until Saturday July 26th. The exhibition which includes the Phoenix Open Selection and Merging Minds Selection will showcase local and national artists and will be curated by Offaly based artist, Niamh White. There will be an emphasis on innovative work and installation with a wide variety of works located in various locations throughout Tullamore. The Phoenix Award of €1,000 for "An Outstanding Work in any Medium" will be presented at the official opening of the exhibitions. The Award for "An Outstanding Work in any Medium" in the Merging Minds Selection, will also be chosen and will be presented at the same event.

Monday 6th July Exhibition Launch in Phoenix Studios (old Texas Warehouse) Join the festivities and refreshments and

face painters, families and children welcome.

Thursday 7pm 9th July Merging Minds A5 Auction Come to the exciting auction and bid on the anonymous images and see your own work going on sale. Prices start at €1, something to suit every budget.

Saturday 11am 24th July Children's Art Walk Colouring Trail Join us at 11 in Texas car park to pick up your Colouring Trail. Follow the clues and find special spot prizes at each colouring station along the way.

No Fixed Abode Pod Cast Launching our pod cast this year we will have interviews and audio walking tour available to download to your MP3 player. Please see website [www.phoenixfestival.ie](http://www.phoenixfestival.ie) and local press for Art Trail and Artists Talks.

# PHOENIX CIRCUS EVENTS



Street theatre is an integral part of the Phoenix Festival, and Stage Craft Ireland, a Tullamore based physical theatre company will provide much of the attractions.

On Friday 17th July 8pm till late - Renegade Show in Loughrey's Bar Hosted by The Gabby Gaelgeoir, Dubliner Oisín Ó Doinn and special guest DJ <M\_O\_D\_E\_M> Improv acts to backing tracks by jugglers for jugglers but all welcome!

Saturday 18th July 10am till 6pm - Circus Workshops in the Big Top at Charleville Castle €35. The day includes an introduction to movement and dance, advanced juggling (lunch) Hulla Hoop, Diabolo, Clowning and Stilts.

Saturday 18th July 12pm - 6pm - Children's Entertainment O'Connor Square includes storytelling, Balloon Animals, Stilt Walkers and Face painting  
Saturday 18th July 8.30pm - Cabaret Caboodle O'Connor Square

The Cabaret Caboodle stage promotes oodles of Physical Theatre in the Midlands by providing an international and local stage. With lots of mesmerising acts, featuring Sweden's amazing acrobatic club juggler, Viktor Gyllenberg and hosted by G.A.A. Circus All-Star's Seamus McJuggler A visionary in street performance, a radical in The Association, Seamus McJuggler is dragging the GAA kicking and screaming into the 21st Century, combining sports, dancing and circus to entertain the masses.

For more Info and Bookings from Stage Craft Ireland Ltd, contact 085 8112051 or see [www.stagecraftireland.com](http://www.stagecraftireland.com)



Wednesday 8th April 2009, in the Dunamaisé Art Centre saw the official launch of  
**"MAGNET FESTIVAL PORTLAOISE"**

**MAGNET FESTIVAL PORTLAOISE** is a community driven festival to replace **The World Fleadh** which was staged in Portlaoise over the past two years. **August Bank Holiday Weekend** is the date for your diary for a feast of music and entertainment throughout the town.

Michael English, international singing sensation, is one of many stars scheduled to appear on stage in the Dunamaisé Arts Centre, and in the Marlborough Suite at the Portlaoise Heritage Hotel, during the star-studded weekend. The main performers include Sharon Shannon Big Band with Shane McGowan, Damien Dempsey and Dessie O'Halloran. Other acts appearing will be: Declan O'Rourke; The Wolfe Tones; Jack L; Liam O'Maonlaí; Damien Bowe and many more.

The festival is totally dependent on open air and street events. Portlaoise's streets will be alive with a feast of activities including: a stage in the Market Square and Lower Square; session trails in the pubs; street singing; markets; heritage walks and amusement arcades. One of the new events this year is **THE VINCENT VAN GOUGH ART Project** known as the "The Method". This features a 70 day

re-enactment of the last 70 days of the life of the famous artist Van Gough. The artist is Stuart Dunne. Stuart, who is well known as the "bad boy, Billy" in Fair City will be in his studio at Church St. across from Dunamaisé Arts Centre. It is hoped to have guided tours of his work during the above period. Full details of the programme of events can be seen on the website [www.magnetportlaoise.com](http://www.magnetportlaoise.com)

Tickets for all events are on sale at The Dunamaisé Arts Centre, Church Street, Portlaoise. Phone 057 8663355. Tickets can be purchased on line at [www.dunamaisé.ie](http://www.dunamaisé.ie).



Liam O'Maonlaí



Jack L



Gerry Ryan, Bord na Mona, Una Parsons, CEO Crafts Council of Ireland, Kevin O'Dwyer, Sculpture in the Parklands, Tom Egan, Bord na Mona, Sinead O'Reilly, Offaly County Council and Gabriel Darcy, MD, Bord na Mona receive business to Arts Award.

## SCULPTURE IN THE PARKLANDS WINS AT BUSINESS TO ARTS AGAIN

**Sculpture in the Parklands received yet another national award this week. The award was for best Cultural Social Responsibility by Business to Arts, and was presented by President Mary McAleese on May 20th**

What the Jury said...

"Bord na Móna's ongoing partnership with Sculpture in the Parklands, Offaly County Council Arts Office and the 2008 collaboration with the Crafts Council of Ireland, stood out for the judges as an exemplary Corporate and Cultural Social Responsibility programme. The success of this initiative is equally due to the financial investment and engagement of Offaly County Council and the Crafts Council of Ireland. In 2008, the combined partnership secured environmental artist, Patrick Dougherty for the residency, who created the monumental Ruaille Buaille. In 2008, Sculpture in the Parklands was included in the programme of the International Peat Congress, introducing delegates to a potential use for cutaway bogs.

Sculpture in the Parklands is a free community recreational facility that is open 365 days of the year. In 2008, a hands-on educational programme for 17 primary schools and a series of master-classes for crafts people were also included in the residency."

Alan Counihan (Irl) and Julian Wild (UK) will be in residence in Sculpture in the Parklands this September

See [www.sculptureintheparklands.com](http://www.sculptureintheparklands.com)

# Performing the written word

The trouble with creative writing is that it is difficult. A lot of people are under the misapprehension that 'writing a story' is a therapeutic process, one that involves plenty of daydreaming. A lot of people are wrong. Creative writing demands rigour, the same kind of discipline and attention to detail that you would expect from an architect. There are characters to develop, the narrative voice to discover, the scene to set, there's psychological action and reaction to reveal and to top it all, there's plot structure to adhere to, all of which has to be composed out of thin air.

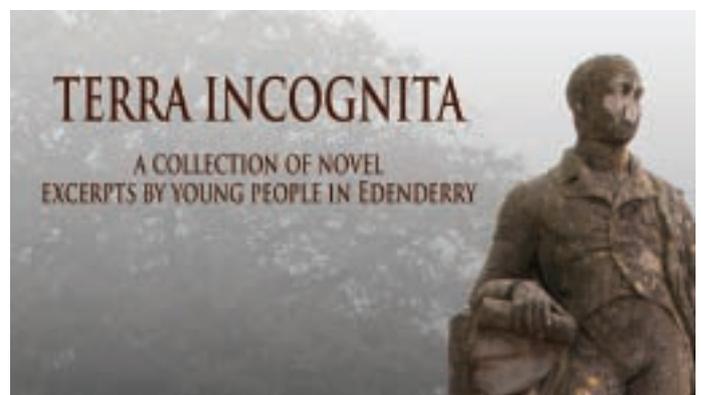
The young writers that worked with authors Caroline Barry and Neil Richardson in Edenderry have taken a creative writing project in a new direction. Instead of appearing in print, the work was dramatically read on stage with the help of actors from Edenderry. Local director and actor, Jim Lawlor worked with the group, designing how best to bring the stories to life.

The interaction between actors and writers is a vital process, hearing how your work sounds out loud is very important. Gaps in the text, slowing of action or lack of tension become very obvious when someone else picks up your work and reads it aloud. The young writers have found the process invaluable.

There is a CD to accompany the project. The audio recording of the young people's stories as well as a memento of their work also breathes new life into the many outcomes any creative writing project can have. Not everything about creative writing has to be enshrined in print. Audio recordings capture potent performances experienced in a short moment of time, performances that are intensified by the fleeting nature of the stage but stamped firmly on the memory. Participants on the course include Claire Nevin, Chris Lally, Adam Kearney, Natasha Murphy, Michael Walsh, Cillian Flood, all of whose work was performed, and thanks also to David McManus, Chris Hickey, Frances Mulraney and Aurelia Rawrr for their dedication to the course over the past several months.

Caroline Barry has had two novels for teenagers published, *The Rocket Girl* and *Isadora Elzbeth*. She is currently working on her third novel for the Orion Publishing House in London. She was writer-in-residence with Laois County Council and has worked for over eight years running creative writing projects for teenagers in Dublin and the Midlands. She has edited and published eight anthologies, taught adult creative writing classes and is about to direct Neil Richardson's play *Through the Dark Clouds Shining*, to be staged in The Civic Theatre, Tallaght in November 2009 and to tour in 2010. She is a regular contributor to the Midlands Arts Magazine.

**Caroline Barry**



# Exquisite CoLab:

Ann Wingfield + Lesley Wingfield + Paul Roy + Celine Sheridan



**The Exquisite CoLab is an experiment in the visual arts currently being undertaken by four Westmeath based artists. Paul Roy, Celine Sheridan and sisters Ann and Lesley Wingfield, together form this artistic collective. Though they are already individually established within the midlands and Ireland, they seek always to move their practice forward in oblique and interesting ways, and to this end, see collaboration as a fascinating opportunity to do so.**

It's a fundamental idea that the creation of art is historically a singular business, the product of an individual, of isolated thought. But collaboration between artists can prove to be fruitful and innovative. Specifically now, visual artists are collaborating directly on works with the intention of creating something new and real. It's with this in mind that they are currently working together on a project with a potentially unlimited scope, four artists exchanging works, ideas, inspiration, with the intention of creating a body of work for exhibition.

Initially, the kernel of this idea came from conversations amongst the four artists, four individuals with unique ideas and styles, but the singular desire to create

viable works of art. It is rooted in the experience of an exhibition of collaborative works viewed by Celine, while working on a residency in Cyprus. And once this idea took hold, it quickly evolved and grew legs, developing into a thing of expansive potential.

The ultimate intention of artistic collaboration is, they feel, to examine the idea of the "third hand". This is where it is to be considered that the collaboration functions almost as a third artist, the combination of the collaborators, but creating with this third hand, almost as if the combination of the two has somehow spawned a third and independent psyche. It's almost like an offspring, the splicing of ideas like DNA, producing individual, and separate consciousness with defining characteristics of both, yet thoroughly individual.

And so, they work together, in a way, and yet also alone, as is the most common modus operandi of the artist. They meet regularly, exchanging ideas and objects, unfinished work, inspirational photographs and materials, music, poetry and opinions. They bring pieces, completed collaborations, to evaluate and critique, and gradually they move forward, building a body of collaborative works, learning about each other, and as a result, learning about oneself, and

hopefully producing an end product which will be truly representational of the intentions with which they started out -to work and create art together, all with the potential to be more than just the sum of its parts. To this end itself, it brings them together to investigate these processes and ideas, learning to interact in ways generally unfamiliar to the artist, face to face, often concurrently on the same surface.

In May 2009 they had the opportunity to spend time residing in the Tyrone Guthrie Centre, interacting on their collaborative work, spending studio time together, discussing, creating, exchanging ideas.

This is all leading towards a joint collaborative exhibition; drawing on the various works they have created to produce a cohesive whole, a demonstration of both the processes and potential of artistic collaboration. They have also been viewing possible and alternative non-gallery exhibition sites, talking to galleries, and visiting artistically rich and stimulating places such as the Friary in Multyfarnham, and the aforementioned Tyrone Guthrie Centre, with the view to future work, interaction and exhibition, potentially with initial showing of their work in Autumn 2009.

For further information contact [colab.ireland@gmail.com](mailto:colab.ireland@gmail.com)

The Exquisite CoLab



# KEN WARDROP

## Laois Patronage Award Winner, 2009

### In conversation with Muireann Ní Chonail, Arts Officer

Ken Wardrop, together with Andy Williams, singer, songwriter, were awarded the Laois Patronage Award, worth €7,000. We are profiling Ken Wardrop in this edition. He was born in Portarlington, Ireland in 1973. He graduated from the Irish National Film School in 2004, and has subsequently been appointed to its Advisory Board. His short films include: the awarding winning Farewell Packets of Ten; Useless Dog and Ouch! His short film Undressing my Mother has received over 20 international awards including the Prix UIP at the 2006 European Film Academy Awards.

He is the co-founder of the Dublin based, production company, Venom. He is currently in post-production on his first feature project, "His & Hers" which will hopefully be released in late autumn 2009.

#### I WOULD LIKE TO FIRST ASK YOU WHAT KICK-STARTED YOUR CAREER IN FILM?

I came to filmmaking rather late in the day. I moved to London and spent seven years there, floating from one job to the next. I can't remember the epiphany, but I ended up on the ferry back to Ireland in 1999, with the grand aspiration of sorting out my life. A year later, and after chance encounters and new friendships, I'd discovered an interest in filmmaking.

Firstly, I thought I would be a producer, then a production designer, I think I even considered acting for a time. I created a portfolio for the different film and theatre colleges. I was fortunate to get my first choice place in the film course at IADT, The National Film School. It wasn't until I was editing my first year final project that I realised that directing might actually suit me. In my final year I worked on a graduation project entitled "Undressing my Mother". It does exactly what it says on the tin - my mother bares all but in a physical and emotional sense. What was intended as a class project has ended up traveling the world and has won a many international awards. It's a film that is

very special to me and is a testament to mother's strength of character and her inner peace. I guess the simple answer would therefore have to be that my mother kick-started my career in film.

#### DID GROWING UP IN PORTARLINGTON IMPACT ON YOU ARTISTICALLY?

Growing up in Portarlington has totally informed my choices as a director to-date. Anyone that is familiar with my short films will attest to this. Subject matters have ranged from cattle herds, to useless dogs and farmers' wives - none of which I have found near my address in South Dublin. The countryside and the Irish Midlands has had far more of an interesting impact on me than, say, going to school in Dublin, or living in London. I can't quite explain it but the best example would have to be my latest project. "His & Hers" is a feature length film that charts a life's journey. It consists of 70 wonderful female characters from across the Irish Midlands.

#### WHAT IMPACT HAD YOUR FILM STUDIES ON YOU?

The biggest impact for me however meeting my colleague, Andrew Freedman. Andrew and I were in the same class together and we quickly realized that we shared the same ambitions, work ethic and most importantly film taste. We've been a team ever since.



#### YOUR AWARDS AND ACHIEVEMENTS ARE VERY IMPRESSIVE; DO THESE ACCOLADES HELP YOUR CAREER?

I'm as proud as punch when I'm referred to as an award-winning director. No amount of money could ever give you the satisfaction than that of your peers acknowledging your work. The awards have also helped to gain some international recognition and promote my profile as a filmmaker.

#### WHAT CHANGES WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE HAPPENING IN THE FILM INDUSTRY IN IRELAND?

There are lots of great initiatives and schemes out there, allowing exciting and daring projects to get made. We have a bit of a "Golden Age" of Irish directors happening at the moment. I guess I would love to see the Irish audiences supporting Irish films more. And I would like to think that there is an audience waiting for my film "His & Hers". We made this film on a micro budget and realistically it's a difficult ask to compete with the Hollywood machine at local multiplexes. However, we believe we're up to the challenge and that our film deserves the opportunity.

Music Network presents



# The Degani Ensemble with Cara O' Sullivan

As part of the Durrow Arts Festival and supported  
by the Arts Office, Laois County Council

on Thursday 10th September 2009 at 8pm  
in the Church of the Most Holy Trinity, Kilkenny Rd., Durrow

The Degani Ensemble was first formed in the mid 1980s by a group of young musicians keen to explore a wide variety of chamber music for wind and strings. Based around oboe and string trio, the ensemble made the inaugural tour of Music Network in 1986, as well as numerous Dublin concerts and media broadcasts.

The ensemble now consists of Ruby Ashley (oboe), Alan Smale (violin), Elaine Clarke (violin), John Lynch (viola) and David James (cello).

The Degani Ensemble will be joined for this very special concert by multi-award winning soprano Cara O'Sullivan. Cork-born Cara O'Sullivan has an impeccable operatic pedigree and has risen to prominence as one of Ireland's leading sopranos. The programme will include music by Mozart, Schubert and Vaughan Williams.



For bookings and further information on the Durrow Arts Festival visit the website at [www.durrowvillage.com](http://www.durrowvillage.com) Email: [durrowdf@eircom.net](mailto:durrowdf@eircom.net) or phone Hugh Sheppard 086 8694691 or Noleen Dunphy 087 9646360.



## Tullamore International Organ Series

Tuesday, 23 June:

Tullamore Academy Chamber Choir,  
(director: Ciaran Brady) John O'Keeffe,  
organ

Tuesday, 21 July:

Liudmila Matsyura (Russia)

Tuesday, 18 Aug:

Stephen Hicks (Norway)

Tuesday, 22 Sept:

The RIAM String Ensemble,  
David Adams, organ

This series of monthly summer concerts is now in its eleventh year and has become a well established feature of the national cultural calendar. The concert series was established to acknowledge the generosity of the Lutheran Church of Copenhagen in giving this magnificent organ to the Church of Assumption in Tullamore.

The organ was built by one of the world's leading organ building firms, Th. Frobenius of Lyngby (Copenhagen), in 1965 for the great cathedral church of Denmark's capital city. In 1993 the cathedral felt it needed a much bigger organ to fill its great space with adequate sound. The cathedral board generously decided to donate it to an appropriate church. Tullamore's requirements for an organ and their request to Prof. Gerard Gillen of NUI Maynooth to assist them in securing an instrument, together with his recital visit to Copenhagen, constituted a remarkable series of coincidences which resulted in the organ's transference to Tullamore in the latter months of 1994.

Tullamore has the largest mechanical action church organ in Ireland and the sole example in the country of the Frobenius firm's renowned skill and craftsmanship.

# "Method in the Midlands"

## by Associated Press

If you strolled down the country this summer in County Laois, you might've happened by Vincent van Gogh. Or, at least, an incarnated force by the name of Stuart Dunne. You might've looked twice in bewilderment at a painter stealing landscapes for his canvas: on the Rock of Dunamaise, in Cosby Hall Stradbally, Emo Court, Jim's Kitchen in Portlaoise or Hume's Pub.

A fevered artist, exalted in the act of creation, at times surrounded by a documentary film crew. The project is being called "The Stuart Dunne Method: The Irish Gaze," and it documents 70 days of character study, as Stuart Dunne probes the mind of painter Vincent van Gogh.

As an actor Stuart Dunne began his career in the Focus Theatre in the early 80's with contemporaries such as Tom Hickey, Mary Moynihan, and Gabriel Byrne. Focus Theatre was a small venue with a big imagination, on Pembroke Lane, devoted to Stanislavski's acting theory and technique. Dunne continued to run The Actors Company in Dublin and then the New Gasworks Theatre in Dun Laoghaire. While committed to his wife Geraldine and 18-year-old son Neil, he enjoyed a career that has taken him through the Abbey, the Olympia, the Project Theatre, Garder Lane, R.T.E., BBC Films, Palace Pictures, and Heuston Films. After a sensational success in the Fair City soap opera, (something along the lines of Tootsie), he fell into reclusion on Dublin's south side.

"Painting, that's all there is, that's all I've been driven by. It's been my life for seven years, although this project has been in the making since 1999," says Dunne. With wild, ginger hair down to his shoulders, sporting a dusty grey beard, and covered in paint, Stuart paces his attic studio not far from Leonard's Corner in Dublin on the eve of his 70-day devotion. "This is my last turn," he explained, "I'm going to be too old, physically, for this kind of exercise. This is it. This is my last bout."

He is attempting to recreate the last 70 days of van Gogh's life. "As close as one can get to the character's life...how they lived, their work, goals, self-image, daily patterns," Dunne says. In the process, he hopes to question and expand some of the fundamental precepts of Stanislavski's system of acting.



Actor Stuart Dunne

The last days of Vincent van Gogh were very prolific and very well documented through his letters to Theo, his brother. In the French village of Auvers, van Gogh produced some 89 works of art before finally committing suicide at the age of 37. In an effort to truly immerse himself into character ("living it," as Stuart says), he will be painting, sculpting, and sketching every day, morning till night, trying to match van Gogh's prodigious output.

"From the footage being recorded, I want to edit three separate works. Some of the footage will be developed for a master course in acting. Another work will stand as a documentary about the creative process itself. This will include interviews with other Irish actors, artists, writers, and it will explore and interrogate Stanislavskian principles as they have evolved over time. The third work will be an independent film, 70 minutes long. This project is wide open. As a film/theatre company we will be dedicated to county Laois over the course of a 3 to 5 year period, returning every summer in order to expand the boundaries of liberal arts in the midlands."

Stuart goes on, "This system, or technique if you like, of acting can be broken down into fundamental stages, which in turn can be applied to other creative realms. A musician can use the method to question how, as an artist, he or she realizes their expression. Painters, writers, photographers, historians, producers, set designers—anyone trying to achieve a level of artistic expression—seeks to discover a process. And this method is human behaviour in its basic form."

Stuart has struggled as an actor and still, with a lifetime of experience behind him, he struggles against the very notions of what acting means. "What is acting? People act everyday. Every man, every woman, has this innate survival mechanism. When we question character study, or try to define our systems to understand identity, we develop an inward gaze. And often self-images only reveal more questions than answers. Especially if you read things backwards," he says, alluding to his 85% dyslexic condition with light wit.

"It's difficult when you are a person with dyslexia because our bureaucratic society relies so heavily on written forms and grammatical prejudices." The Northern Ireland Arts Council and the Art Council/An Chomhairle Ealaion granted the project an Arts and Disability Award in January 2009 that allowed him to begin production.

"I think it was a good start for dyslexia awareness and this project could lead us anywhere." Stuart goes on to point out that his film director, John Karabetos, is from the United States and his director of photography is from Czech Republic.

"I think this exercise opens doors, opens doors inside the image we make of ourselves and others. No better place to begin that journey than on the Rock of Dunamaise, in the midlands of Irishness."

Further information on the project available from: [www.themethod.ie](http://www.themethod.ie) and 057-8688239

# ATHLONE

## Literary Festival

This year's Festival will take place over the weekend of September Fri/Sat Sun 25th/26th/27th. The Friday night event, "The Big Question", is an evening where invited panelists (including Brendan Keenan, journalist Irish Independent; Stephen King, former advisor to David Trimble) will present a paper (approx 10 mins each) on the subject matter of their choice, in other words what they think is the Big Question on the day. This will be followed by a lively questions and answers session which will be chaired by Donncha O'Connell (NUIG).

### BOOK CLUB WORKSHOP WITH DERMOT BOLGER

Children's Workshop on Bookmaking from the National Print Museum (Sat 26th Sep) Children will learn how to make a hardback book in the traditional manner. They will use special handmade paper and card to create books that can later be used as diaries, notebooks or sketchbooks. This workshop is limited to a maximum of 12 children per session. All the materials are provided.

### ATHLONE LITERARY FESTIVAL - BACKGROUND

This festival had its origins in the John Broderick Weekend. The first of these was held in May, 1999 and was hosted by the Rotary Club of Athlone. Spurred on by the success of that event the John Broderick Committee was formed and it was this committee which organised the 2001 event.

In 2003, the committee decided that Athlone needed a major literary event and that the focus of the John Broderick Weekend was too narrow to attract national attention. It was agreed to change the name to Athlone Literary Festival but apart from a change of name there was also a change of focus. Whilst still retaining a John Broderick element it was felt that we should broaden the appeal and become more outward looking and aim to attract to Athlone a share of the many talented writers that this island produces. From these humble beginnings, a major literary event is growing.

[www.athlone.ie/literaryfestival](http://www.athlone.ie/literaryfestival)

# Summer Arts Programme 2009 in Laois

ARTS • DANCE • CREATIVE WRITING • KINDERMUSIC • POTTERY

The Arts Office, Laois County Council are delighted to announce another programme of Summer Arts Workshops throughout the county for this Summer of 2009. As in previous years there is a rich mix of arts activities to look forward to in this year's programme of events, including art, drama, dance, creative writing, kindermusic, and pottery.



### The courses will be held as follows:

- Art Workshops will take place in Luggacurren and Abbeyleix with Patricia Bennett; in Portlaoise and Portarlinton with tutor, Siobhan Keogh.
- Creative Writing Workshops will take place in Portlaoise for young people with tutor, Ann Egan.
- Traditional/Modern, Music and Dance Workshops will take place in Portlaoise with tutors, Aisling Walsh and John Davidson.
- Drama Workshops will take place in Portarlinton with Julie Duane.
- Kindermusic Workshops will take place in Abbeyleix and Portlaoise with tutor, Alison Sweeney.
- Pottery Workshops will take place in Mountmellick and Mountrath with tutor, Edel O'Keefe.

### Full details and bookings forms are now available from:

The Arts Office, Laois County Council, Áras an Chontae, Portlaoise, Co. Laois Tel: 057 8674342/41 Fax 057 8674382 Email: [artsoff@laoiscoco.ie](mailto:artsoff@laoiscoco.ie)

## MIDLAND MASTER CLASSES

Welcome to a summary programme of master classes and professional development opportunities for arts practitioners across the Midlands.

This range of events is being delivered by nationally recognised experts, and there is something for musicians, writers, visual artists and drama practitioners. For further details and booking information please contact your local arts office (see back page for details). Numbers on many workshops are limited and early booking is advised. It is not recommended to turn up at events without pre booking, as you may be disappointed to be turned away. At the time of going to print all information was correct however please check with your local arts office for any change.

Date/time/€	Event	Venue	Facilitator
Saturday Sept 19 10am to 4pm €20	Painting techniques	Templemichael College, L'ford	Maria Gkinala
Saturday Sept 19 10am to 4pm €20	Low light photography	Templemichael College, L'ford	Tony Murphy
Saturday 19 Sept 10am to 4pm €20	Music in Context	The Old School House, Kinnegad	Elaine Agnew and Aingeala de Burca
Tuesday 29 <sup>th</sup> of September 10am to 1pm €15	Public Art Commissions;	Dunamais Arts Centre	Ruairi O'Cuiv
October 7 <sup>th</sup> 10am- 4pm €20	Installation based art practice	Market House Gallery, Mullingar	Mark Garry
Friday October 9 <sup>th</sup> 10am to 4pm €20	Portraiture master class	Dunamais Arts Centre	Mick O'Dea
October 12 <sup>th</sup> 10.00am-4.00pm €20-€25	Development of creative design and art practise with social consciousness	Hilltown House Castlepollard	Caelan Bristow & Sarah Entwistle
October 12 <sup>th</sup> 10am to 4pm	Working with private and public galleries	Dunamais Arts Centre	Eilis Lavelle and Jerome O'Drisceoil
Oct 17 10am- 4pm €20	"Directing From Page to Stage"	Hilltown House	Paul Meade

# Engineering and Art

ADRIAN DUNCAN



Adrian Duncan's recent exhibition, Cork to Longford, in The Joinery, Dublin, comprised of a set of pencil drawings, made in response to the post-boom rural landscape. The show was conceived after a recent trip he made from Cork City to his home in Ballymahon, Co. Longford. Adrian noticed the scarring of the countryside; with unfinished and badly placed developments, buildings and roads. Though not a literal interpretation of the architectural, planning and engineering decisions made over the last fifteen years, the drawings reflect the mindset and myopic nature of the process. There is no evidence of human presence in these drawings. This reflects the decisions of developers and planners; decisions made with money, not with human interest.

Before returning to university to study fine art at I.A.D.T., Adrian studied and worked as a structural engineer in the U.K. and Ireland for fourteen years. He also contributed illustrations to newspapers and magazines. The manner of thinking in Engineering and Fine Art is quite different - engineering thought processes are deductive, logical and practical, whereas the thought and physical processes in fine art are more fluid and less ostensibly direct - there is an element of creativity and discipline in both.

Adrian tries to strike the balance between these, and appreciates how one can influence the other positively. His recent essay, relating to this issue, was published in *Some Blind Alleys*, a new, online journal of creative writing.

Returning to the engineering and art crossover; Adrian's next exhibition takes place, in July of this year, in Pallas Contemporary Projects, Dublin. It is loosely based on Anton Chekhov's short story; *Gooseberries*. The thrust of the exhibition, is to break down notions of perception and meaning into two simple geometric shapes (suspended steel plate sculptures). Here, Adrian feels, his engineering background, proved to be of critical use. The exhibition runs from the 19th to the 23rd of July at P.C.P.

[www.pallasprojects.org](http://www.pallasprojects.org) [www.thejoinery.org](http://www.thejoinery.org)

[www.someblindalleys.com](http://www.someblindalleys.com) [www.adrianduncan.eu](http://www.adrianduncan.eu)

## Birr Theatre Exhibitions embark on a new journey

Birr Theatre and Arts Centre are expanding their thinking once more and taking an exhibition out of the centre and into the town.

Roscrea based artist, Werner Groll, will exhibit his large timber sculptures this July and August throughout Birr. Werner, who works with a variety of timbers, explains that Ireland has provided him with a lot of inspiration for his sculptures. "I come from a small village in a large forested area where wood was essential to our daily lives. By using timber I hope to increase the life of the wood and enhance the shape and beauty of a piece of our natural environment".

Werner's work, which has been seen in Germany and throughout Ireland including the Civic Offices in Nenagh, RDS, Phoenix Park, National Botanic Gardens, will be on exhibit throughout July and August in Birr in numerous venues throughout the town: Birr Theatre & Arts Centre; Birr Castle; Birr Technology Centre; Dooly's Hotel; County Arms Hotel; Tesco; Supervalu and Bank of Ireland. Full details of the exhibition on [www.birththeatre.com](http://www.birththeatre.com) or 057 9122911



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