



# LANDMARK

A PUBLIC ART PROGRAMME FOR MAYO

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**Artists:** Fionnuala Hanahoe *Bridging Sounds*, Jennifer Brady *The Known World*, Tom Swift *Across the Lough*, Rob and Matt Vale *Lough Lannagh Ripples*, Ian Wilson *Still Life in Green and Red*, Cleary & Connolly *On Sight*, Elaine Griffin *Landmark*

**Texts and interviews:** Sarah Searson

Commissioned by Mayo County Council Arts Office.

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## INTRODUCTION

Curated by the Public Arts coordinator with Mayo County Council, Gaynor Seville, *Landmark* was a multi-dimensional public art project sited in the area of Lough Lannagh, Castlebar. Planned in anticipation of a new park and its redevelopment, *Landmark* was a programmatic series of connected commissions. Seville supported artists to work through a number of dynamic responses to the context. Two artists were selected to have works permanently sited in the park, two smaller commissions were designed to be of interest to younger artists, there was a year-long residency project for a composer and two commissions were temporary or performance-based. The programme, which was over two years in development, was launched in April 2012.

In devising and managing the programme, Seville was keen that the funds available under the government's Per Cent for Art Scheme be treated cohesively, and so rather than commission a plethora of disjointed individual artworks for unrelated sites and communities, Lough Lannagh would form the centre of a project which reached out across many places and communities in Mayo, involving local people both as audience and as participants. Alongside the programme, professional development events were designed to support local artists in their practice via a professional development programme, Connect. The artist Aideen Barry developed Connect initiatives in collaboration with Seville, which included a new iPhone and android app, *artconnect*, as a networking and

information tool for artists. They also devised and ran Fake Public Art Panels, with artists invited to be judges for the day to raise their awareness of the process and how best to present your work and ideas to panels.

Very close to the town centre, Lough Lannagh is parkland which had until recently had been overgrown and hidden. Over the last two years it has been upgraded, and these improvements have changed the area's usage pattern, as it had been the site of much anti-social – or too-social – behaviour, depending on your viewpoint.

The park is now changed, attracting runners and walkers of all ages. The water mass that extends into Bilberry Lake can be as smooth as glass or rough and choppy depending on the

weather, and in the far distance is Croagh Patrick. There is archaeological evidence of a submerged crannog, and it is estimated that a treasure trove of Bronze Age and Early Medieval objects may lie on the lakebed.

The artist Michael Fortune has made a short film and series of videos about each of the commissions. These can be found at [www.landmarkpublicart.com](http://www.landmarkpublicart.com). This booklet of artists' interviews was written and compiled by Sarah Searson to give a deeper sense of each artist's practice, and offers insight into their interests and approaches.

*‘We want to live in a small community with which we can identify and yet we want all the facilities of the city of millions of people. We want to have very intense urban experiences and yet we want the open space right next to us’.*

**Moshe Safdie<sup>[i]</sup>**

***Prologue:***

**A WORKING ARM; THE STUFF OF LEGENDS.**

Since way back the romantic notion of a big windfall had the potential to realise my dream of living on a crannog. Lough Lannagh would be ideal. From there, in the middle of lake, I would look after a flock of Ariel white swans, I could shimmy in and out of Castlebar, across to Tesco, over to the Cafe Rua by The Mall and on up to the Theatre.

The local youth might park up nearby and pop across my gangplank for a nightcap; we could take in an episode of the *Hardy Bucks* [ii]. I'd ask them to be quiet after midnight, except on long summer nights, when the distant high jinks of men visiting with men could carry out across the water into the dark of the night. They might be easily

mistaken for the sounds of lovesick young swains. Lough Lannagh could be lovely.

I'd keep it spruce – you would like it. I would build it in the middle of the lake, there in the sightline of the regal Croagh Patrick, which rises up beyond the lake water's vanishing point. This mountain will be the important to me, as it's the spear behind which the sun and moon travel, helping to track time. The seasons will roll on, and I will grow old as winter passes into summer. In the dark times fog, ice, lashing wind and rain cuts up the water, but I would stick it out no matter how I felt, because the truth is, out there, just me with nature, well, it could be a bit daunting. Naturally, this is the

aspiration of a city-dweller, under the influence of an '80s school textbook filled with beguiling illustrations of the Bronze Age. I seem to remember a remarkably well groomed, nuclear family, all furs, big hair and fancy lace work on the boots, living in natty lake huts. Nostalgic fictions of course. But a more bucolic setting would be hard to find. We had a fondness, or those who could afford it did, for such sites in Ireland.

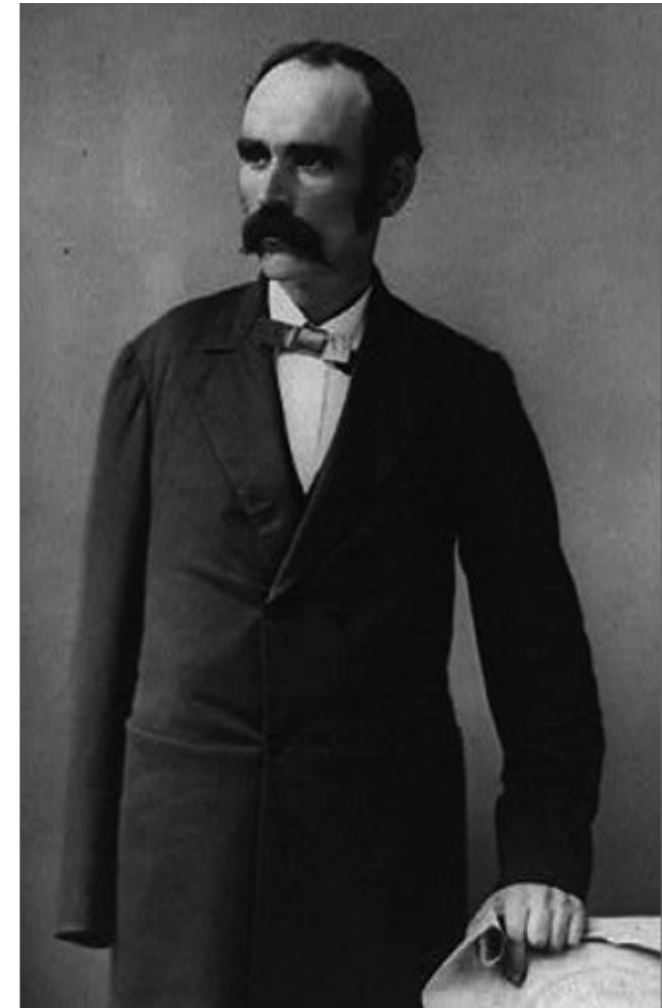
The meaning of public and private, our understanding of the distribution of it, has changed. Maybe as it always has been shifting. The emphasis on the picturesque and the pleasantness of our green country has been to the fore of our identity. How we value this has not. How our sense of place sticks or falls away with ownership is evolving. A reappraisal of our value of the landscape and land changes with our desire to make it function, make it work, and this topic is once more very much to the fore.

How the natural world is utilised continues to draw tense lines through this country. In 2012 in nearly every

small town in Ireland the pageantry of St Patrick's Day parades raised a smirk as septic-tank-related 'floats' married the bounds of good taste with St Paddy to yield in all sorts of scatological articulations, some of them really very witty. Waste and water, sea and land are all amenities which been be revised for ownership. As public goods now turn to commodities that can 'return', 'pay their way', or 'wash their face'.

Any fan of Deleuze and Guattari will tell you that there is no centre; any fan of Bauman will talk you into a *Liquid Life*. All change always – but how?

In 1846, the father of an eleven-year-old migrant Mayo boy turned child labourer saw his boy lose an arm in a spinning mule of a Lancashire Mill. This was a father who had failed in his rent payments, and was put off the land. He brought his family away in the hope of a more stable life. It was from this perspective that his disabled son was politicised, all his life campaigning for fairness in tenancy and labourers' conditions. Beyond his work in Ireland, that young man grew up to take a world view of his place and time: he



▲  
Napoleon Sarony's portrait of Michael Davitt, New York 1882, sourced from The Library of Congress.

supported Jews of Kishinev in Russia, where vicious anti-Semitic persecution was bubbling up in the early 1900s; he would influence Gandhi; and is credited with being a founder of the British Labour Party. A remarkable Mayo man, a remarkable life.

In 1930, a teacher who shares the same name as the famous painter Patrick Caulfield, was cutting turf on a blanket bog on the Erris Peninsula, then a quiet place. It's a hotter spot today, as it must have in the Bronze Age, today newishly found fault-lines in the sea bed running westerly have brought the big guns in. While working for the winter fuel, Caulfield discovered patterns that identified Neolithic and Bronze Age settlements known now as the Ceide Fields. This led to an unearthing of evidence of a sophisticated agrarian community, one of the oldest types in Europe. There was a big population on those north Mayo fields successfully working land into a useful living, innovating, striving, making good what surrounded them. How the land was settled, how it would have been contested, who distributed it – well, these are the stories of myth. The road to Westport runs parallel

to Lough Lannagh. Out there the light flickers on Clew Bay as the day declines over the Atlantic. Castlebar a busy and important town in Mayo, and like so many Irish towns, it has a spreading footplate. It's a short drive out to Westport, the ribbons and dots of houses seem to reduce the expansion of the landscape connecting the places as if they are suburbs of each other. They blur.

In this small Island, distinction has been everything. It's how we operate. Distinction is identity, we know this, as worldwide we figure out our parameters. Clarity about who we are is increasingly complex and difficult. Rebecca Solnitt wrote about Ireland in the 1990s, in *The Book of Migrations* [iv], she spoke then of the dangers of trying to establish a single truth about a place, that blurring distinctiveness renders culture meaningless. It seems for so many people, included those of us who haven't won the lottery and built on a lake, things haven't panned out as planned. Change hasn't come in the usual pattern of peaks and troughs, but has appeared now as a long, slow tourniquet that would nearly take your arm off.

So now I remember sometime round 1997 in a lecture hall in Dublin, a man from Mayo County Council[iv] gave a talk on a geographic approach to arts planning, based on ideas from the French Pays. He was suggesting that we should be thinking deeply about the local; about townlands, clustered specialisms, that this is a sensible approach to the future, because it acknowledges what is known, what has been established, and it is from that place what can be applied will emerge. Illuminating the point where psychology and geography meet is the work of thinkers and makers; is the function of the wander, of the artist too at times. The need for this it seems is not news in Mayo.

*Sarah Searson*

<sup>[i]</sup> Moshe Safdie, Israeli/Canadian architect, is an urban designer, educator, theorist, and author.

<sup>[ii]</sup> “*The Hardy Bucks* is an Irish mockumentary TV show written by Chris Tordoff, Martin Maloney and Mike Cockayne. *The Hardy Bucks* started out with a series of largely improvised online webisodes. A six-part webisode series went on to win the 2009 Storyland competition held by Irish national broadcaster RTÉ. It is set in a small town in West Ireland, following the misadventures of five hapless men down on their luck, trying to leave their backwards rural hometown and attempt to reach Galway and sample modern civilization. Sourced at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hardy\\_Bucks](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hardy_Bucks)”

<sup>[iii]</sup> Rebecca Solnitt, *A Book of Migrations: Some Passages in Ireland*, Verso; Pbk. Ed edition (June 17, 1998) ISBN-10: 1859841864

<sup>[iv]</sup> John Coll, who at the time was Mayo County Arts Officer, is currently Director of Services, Community and Enterprise.

*‘It is the juxtaposition of [this] non-expert use of music in a context that has been expertly perceived in visual and experiential terms that is really interesting to me.’*

**Fionnuala Hanahoe**

## **BRIDGING SOUNDS | FIONNUALA HANAHOE**

Installed over the launch weekend, Bridging Sounds was a temporary interactive audio and sculptural work made for the new bridge that spans Lough Lannagh. These multiple sculptural objects, suggestive of megaphones, generated sound when activated by walkers and passers-by. Each one emitted ethereal musical tones, making it possible almost to play the bridge. Walkers could make a fleeting soundtrack, which bounced eerily out over the water, back towards the town on one side, and out into the far-extending lake on the other. This was an invitation to be playful and celebratory, but also to pause and observe. The installation of the new pedestrian bridge makes it possible now to walk out alongside the lake and loop back on the opposite shore, bringing walkers back close to the centre of the town.

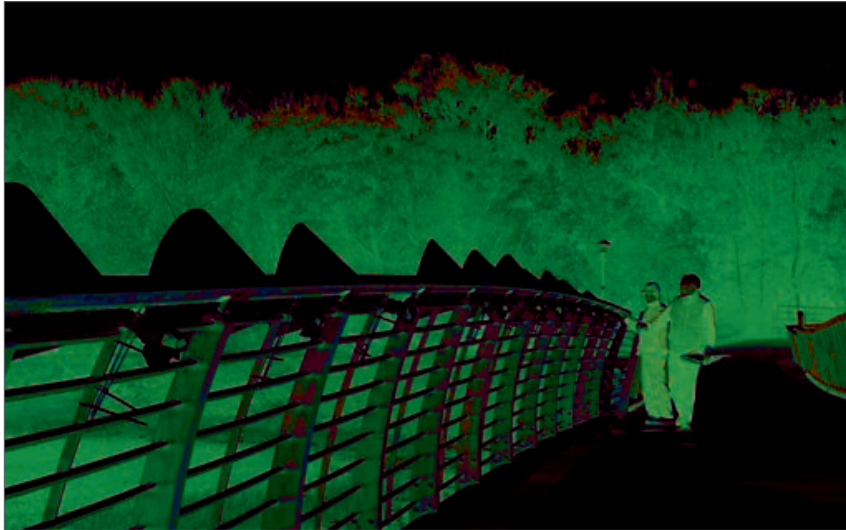
### INTERVIEWER

By populating the bridge with numerous custom-built loudspeakers activated by participants, you recast social and sculptural relationships as musical. This was exciting because it blurred a line between improvised and incidental. And the visual impact was engaging and playful and really successfully resolved. Can you speak a bit about these choices and the process which brought the piece to realisation?

### HANAHOE

In *Bridging Sounds*, the sound modules – large white megaphone-type structures – were used to visually entice engagement. The synthesized choir sounds that





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Bridging Sounds Installation.

emanated when the modules were activated by passers-by were used for the same reason.

My research for the work involved taking apart and exploring the mechanics of children's early learning musical toys. I adapted the low-tech technology used in these gadgets and applied it in order to turn the bridge into a sort of musical learning tool.

These early learning toys are used by children to learn about themselves and their environments, both physically

and socially. I set up 32 modules in four groups of octave scales – directly mimicking these toys. And although the aesthetic of Bridging Sounds was much more sublime, visually and sonically, than the typical primary-coloured musical toy, the underlying principle of exploring through process was the same.

INTERVIEWER

Are you interested in the increasing hybridization between the domains of visual art and music? It strikes me that

music is a language of structure and form that brings exciting interests and constructs for visual artists. Or is it the other way around, in that visual arts and music support each other and work well in exchange, leading to innovation and artistic reach?

HANAHOE

Yes, I think they support each other. I am interested in the work of artists who use music in their work – Susan Philipsz being an example. I think the way she dramatically alters the perception of a space, not usually associated with music, through the use of music is disarmingly simple and beautifully poetic. Music can have this immediately emotive and engaging power. Philipsz uses her unaccompanied, untrained voice in a lot of her work – a sort of everyday voice, how one might sing in the shower, for example! It is the juxtaposition of this non-expert use of music in a context that has been expertly perceived in visual and experiential terms that is really interesting to me. My experiments with music as a material for Bridging Sounds were likewise non-expert

in a musical sense. My intentions in my work, for me as much as for other users of the work, are also to be playful, immersive and experimental. I composed the music for Bridging Sounds on an inexpensive synthesizer app, which I downloaded from the App Store. This music was then re-recorded onto cheap, low-tech, battery-operated sound cards with low quality speakers. The environment of the site did the work in terms of amplification and atmospherically carrying the sound.

INTERVIEWER

This new bridge has changed the way people use the park, as it's now possible now to cross the water and walk about the lake in a loop. And so your work sonically and visually inhabited this *new* space. It's a work which is celebratory, and musically loops too, Were those your intentions when responding to the site?

HANAHOE

My initial consideration when responding to the site was the name of the commission. The meaning of the word *Landmark* includes a 'boundary' or an event or an object in the landscape that directs. Breaking up the

word into *land* and *mark* I considered mark-making on the landscape and how we do and can do that. The newest prominent landmark at Lough Lannagh is the new bridge, and as you say, it guides and facilitates people in walking a full circle or loop of the site. So while the new bridge acts as a very permanent and functional mark in the landscape, it was my intention to provide people who use the site with the chance to make their own marks – albeit very temporary and intangible ones – on it.

This led me to the use of sound as a material. Mark making is a way of communicating and sound seemed like a very good tool in such a vast space. The vast space of the Lough is intersected by the new bridge, making it an appropriate and effective place to set up an intervention. Sound is also a material that works well with the space as it is carried by the elements of water and wind – the bridge occupies a very exposed site. There is this idea of ‘connecting’ in the work, and the site also seemed symbolically appropriate in this regard.

INTERVIEWER

Many of your works are modular; they are objects which can be built, changed and re-made. Will you talk about the device of re-presentation and your artistic influences and intentions in this?

HANAHOE

In my work I investigate ways to encourage people to re-engage with a creativeness and playfulness which, I think, are inherent in all of us. My job in making the work, as I see it, is to make sure that the materials and structure of the work do enough to encourage this creative and playful participation. I like to literally place the work in people’s hands. A work that is modular in scheme allows this to happen. In the objects of the work I can engineer material elements that will react to and with the environment, and I can suggest, again through the material and structure of the components, how they might be used or put together. Ultimately, however, it is the viewer, through his or her own creativeness and action, who decides the composition of the work visually (or sonically in the case of *Bridging*

*Sounds*), and injects new intentions into the work and its interpretation. This inherent open-endedness gives the user a role that is very active. It is not that I think that contemplation of a more finished work is inactive or passive. Far from it: the contemplation of a so-called finished work can be very active on the part of a viewer. It is just that by inviting viewers to carry on the task of making a work, you are inviting them into a process that is very physical. You are inviting them to be the artist, and in inhabiting that role, to investigate a space that is process-driven and poetic. I think this offers a very different perspective and an opportunity for learned rather than mediated knowledge. Work that is modular in nature helps to facilitate this process.

INTERVIEWER

What about your interests and the importance to your practice of engaging with public spaces and contexts? For example, you have worked with curators who are interested in these areas such as Sally Timmons in St Anne’s Park and Sculpture in Context, but also with curator Elizabeth Hatz.

HANAHOE

My work is concerned with the users of the work and the potential creative power that they have in a space. I am interested in facilitating people who would normally or routinely use a site, interrupting this routine, and somehow encouraging them to make their own public artwork.

Public space and contexts suggest the communal and an opportunity for relational engagement. While I am interested in this aspect of working in public space I am also interested in providing the users of the work with an opportunity for an introspective and immersive and very individual involvement with their environment. I am interested in placing objects in public space in order to encourage and facilitate the user, to depart from his or her normal or routine use of a space and to instead explore a creative process and exchange with and within that space. So the ‘Public Artwork’ is not the objective of the work but the vehicle. The objective is to facilitate a particular and unexpected communal experience, individual experience and the memories and considerations

of those experiences, in a particular context and environment.

INTERVIEWER

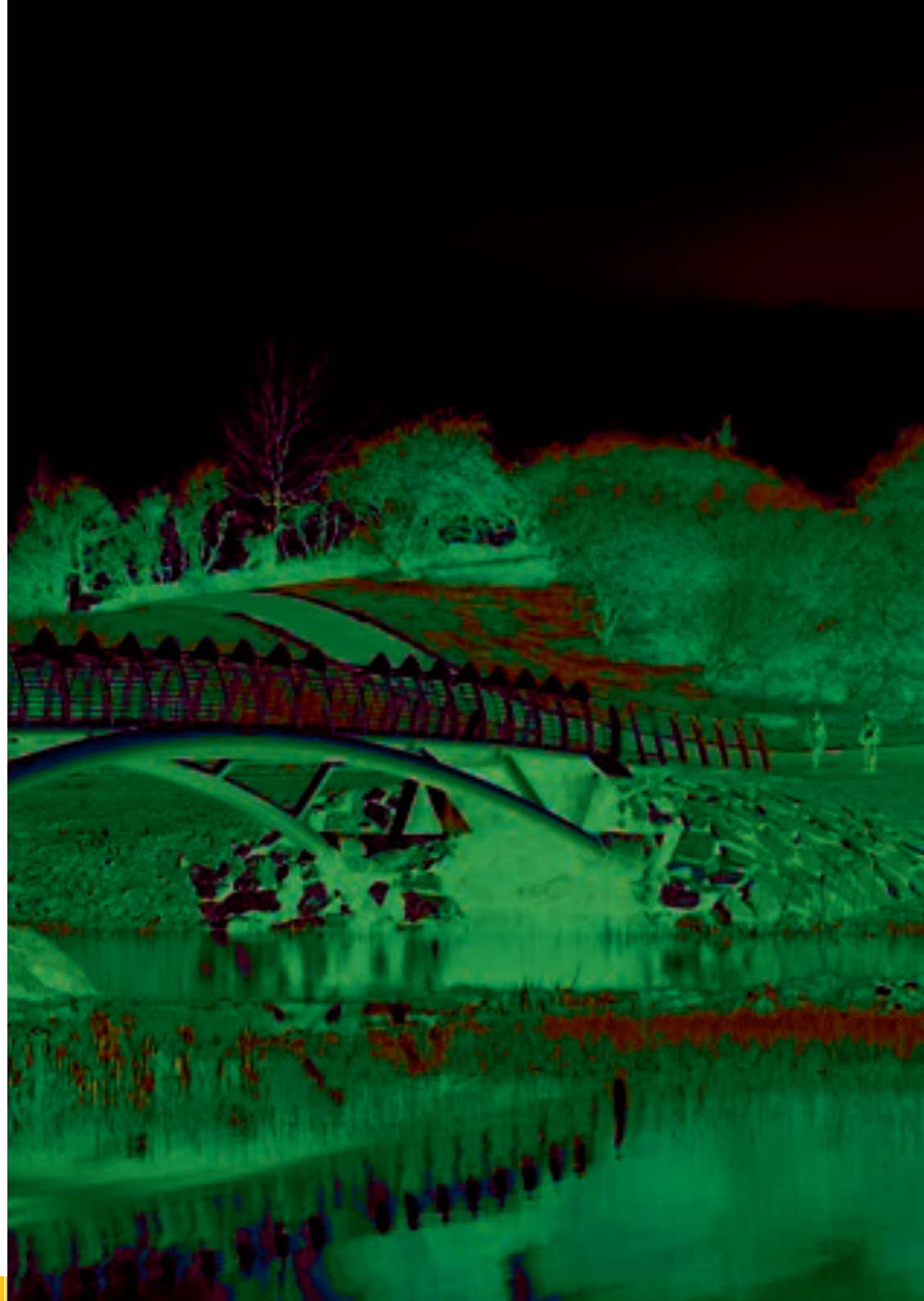
Has your background in politics and history positioned your arts practice?

HANAHOE

I suppose that, to an extent, we are all subconsciously influenced by everything in our own backgrounds, which for me would include my degree in history and politics. Although I

have a healthy interest in history and politics, I do not, however, consciously include any political influences or intentions in my artworks. My art practice is more fundamentally concerned with individual creative experience and exploring a poetic space in that experience.

Fionnuala Hanahoes work investigates the experiential elements of time and space. Using materials which encourage immersive, playful and open-ended engagement, she seeks to simultaneously promote an introspective and extrospective involvement of the viewer. She is interested in placing the work literally in the hands of viewers so that they may create their own space. She is making artworks that offer the potential for experienced knowledge rather than mediated knowledge. Her work specifically investigates the notion of a poetic space through the exploration of our physical environment. Hanahoe is based in Dublin and holds a BFA from the National College of Art and Design (2009) and a BA in History and Politics from University College Dublin (1995). Her recent exhibitions include *Hopeful Structures*, Dublin (2010), EV+A, Limerick (2010), NCAD Degree Show, Dublin (2009), *RDS Student Art Exhibition*, Dublin, Tipperary and Tyrone (2008), and the *RHA Annual Exhibition*, Dublin (2007).

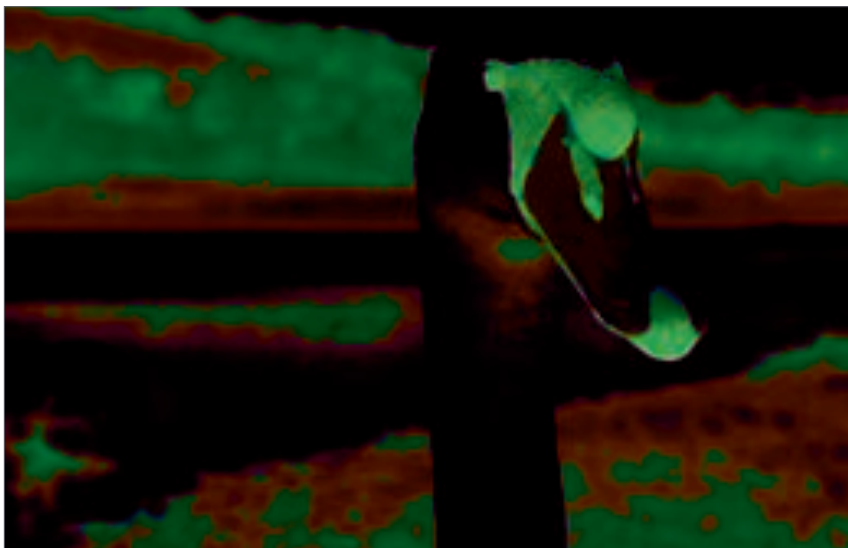


*‘I was looking at different approaches to the representation of nature in film, approaches which complicate its representation. Like for instance, the ways in which Werner Herzog portrays nature in some of his films’.*

**Jennifer Brady**

## **THE KNOWN WORLD | JENNIFER BRADY**

Made over the period of a year *The Known World* is an experimental nature documentary focusing on the Mute Swans living at Lough Lannagh. Borrowing from the language of the familiar televisual format, the video conceives of the swan as a symbol of uncertainty, mapping a natural history of misinformation, transition and change. The work was presented on a monitor in the sitting room of a cottage in Lough Lannagh holiday village. It is the fourth in a series of films made by Brady in a variety of urban contexts. Of note in this commission is her collaboration on the development of the soundtrack, which extends her visual language to represent the animal world as imbued with the peculiarly complex physiological behaviour which is the preserve of humans observing them.



^  
The Known World (video still)

#### INTERVIEWER

One of the themes I see in your work is an interest in engaging with the notions of the periphery. I think you do this by choosing to work within the thin line that can exist between fact and fiction. In this way, you consider how fictional narratives are used to illustrate, or give openings to the unexplainable. The research and decision making for this video work was extensive.

#### BRADY

I suppose conceptually I'm interested in ambiguities. Although I use factual information about real events, people or places as starting points, my working processes often involve tempering this information, complicating it, pulling it apart and putting it back together in a different way. I think that we have an increasingly complex relationship with reality and this is reflected in

contemporary imaging of the 'real'. Rancière has commented on these problematics in *The Future of the Image*, declaring '...there are no more images but only a reality incessantly representing itself to itself'<sup>11</sup>. We have completely absorbed the language of documentary filmmaking and are now familiar with the 'structured reality' of current reality TV programming. There is confusion between what is 'real' and what is 'staged' and I'm interested in the murky territory in between.

#### INTERVIEWER

*The Known World* is the fourth in a series of short video works made by you over the past three years. It resembles a nature documentary of sorts; the script, initially, seems to be written and delivered with a fairly stolid BBC-like tones; observing the nature and representation of swans. Is it an anthropomorphic comment on where we are at right now?

#### BRADY

Yes, the video emulates and breaks with certain structures and conventions within nature documentary, but I

<sup>11</sup> Jacques Rancière, *The Future of the Image* (2007), Verso

wanted to stretch it to allow the work to absorb broader thematics. I had imagined the narration being in the style of a nature documentary, but framed as though the narrator were reflecting on the subject rather than describing it in great factual detail, occasionally introducing less than reliable or exaggerated information about this species of bird.

Also, I wanted to consider the swan as a symbolic creature, looking at swans and symbolism within a nature documentary format. Obviously in Ireland, the swan is a familiar motif in mythology, but I wanted to frame the swan as a symbol for uncertainty – that the work would become a sort of natural history of uncertainty. This was perhaps prompted by the times that we are living through, as well as having Nassim Taleb's theory of Black Swan events in my mind.

I was interested in this theory of Black Swan events in relation to the notion of prediction; that improbable and unpredictable Black Swan events lead to the 'degradation of predictability'. I think that due to the fact that our

world seems to be hanging in the balance, we have seen an abundant use of science fiction tropes in recent contemporary art practice articulating these anxieties and speculating on what is to come. I wanted to explore this notion of prediction in relation to narrative structure, evoking a doom-like, apocalyptic tone towards the end, leading the viewer to anticipate a certain type of ending, which never arrives. In the end, the work undermines itself, challenges the credibility of its own message and destabilizes the reliability of everything that has gone before.

INTERVIEWER

In a previous work you referenced the Hungarian physicist, Dennis Gabor's 1972 book *The Mature Society: a Vision of the Future*, who like the scientist, Joseph Weizenbaum, was part of the Jewish exodus from mainland Europe. These two men, who suffered catastrophic traumas, became concerned with the ethical and humanitarian perspectives of man and his machines. Ideologically today, Ireland is a country at sea, and yet, in this window there is both possibility and danger. The swan, in

many ways, is a wonderful motif for this, would you agree?

BRADY

Yes, I would certainly agree.

INTERVIEWER

This project has been in development for over a year, and to me, it marks a change in your cinematic language.

BRADY

I suppose my work comes from a curiosity about film language, and in particular its ability to make viewers empathize in various ways with certain images. This commission has allowed me to become looser in my working processes. In terms of image-making, there is more movement in this work than in previous videos, simply due to the fact that I was filming animals whose movements are unpredictable. You can't anticipate their behaviour and compose shots in advance – you have to be ready to move with them, and I think that this has led to a looser style. In terms of research for this work, there were a number of films that were important to me, but no one film in particular. I watched quite a lot of nature documentaries when doing research for the script, as I wanted to

emulate the tone of writing, which is often quite pompous. In something like *Life on Earth*, David Attenborough's pioneering nature documentary series from the 1970s, there is a definite weight to the words in the script.

I was also interested in Walt Disney's 1958 nature documentary *White Wilderness*, which used various staging tactics in its production, one of which led to the perpetuation of the myth of lemming suicide. Lemming mass migration has often been mistaken for mass suicide. One scene in the film fabricated a mass suicide event when a group of lemmings were propelled over a cliff top by a rotating platform. I was interested in this element of staging and their use of this unreliable information, as we assume that nature documentaries provide the viewer with reliable, authoritative information.

But mostly, I was looking at different approaches to the representation of nature in film; approaches which complicate its representation. Like for instance, the ways in which Werner Herzog portrays nature in some of his films. Even in *Burden of Dreams*, the

1982 Les Blank documentary about the making of *Fitzcarraldo*, Herzog describes the jungle as being 'full of obscenity'; he speaks of nature that is violent, like a malevolent force. I was interested in this depiction of nature that has some sort of agency. Also, David Gladwell's recently redistributed film *Requiem for a Village* from 1975 is a great example. The film itself is a sort of elegy for the demise of pastoral life in England and its entire cast was local residents from the town in Suffolk where it was shot. It seems like the type of film that could emerge from a public art commission today.

INTERVIEWER

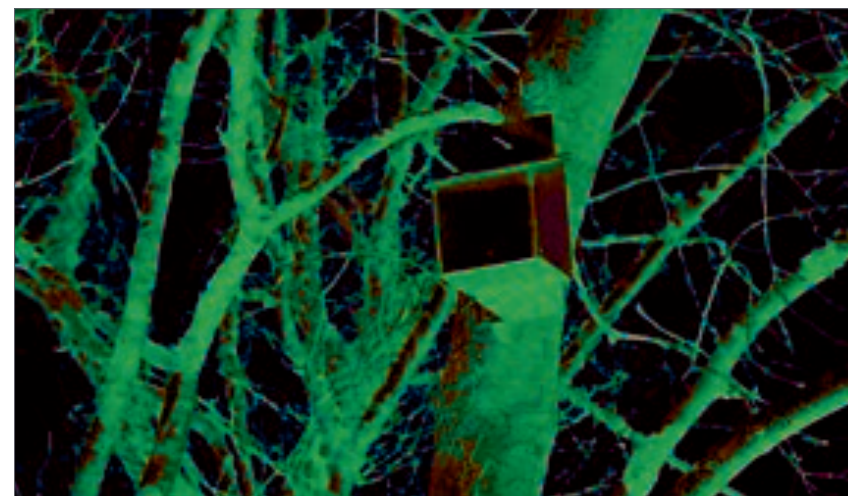
You collaborated in making the work also with artists and musicians Andrew Fogarty and David Lacey, whose original score adds to the atmosphere of your film and its narrative structure. In what way do you think this collaboration enables a development of the work and sees you move towards a more conventional director's role? With all the benefits and insights that working with other practitioners brings, is this the type (and level) of engagement you would like to work with in the future?

## BRADY

Yes, working on this project also allowed me to think about sound and score a very different way. Until recently, the only extra diegetic sound I have used in my work is voiceover, and this has been an important device for me. My videos often play on the relationship between text and image and identify with certain ideas about film and illusion central to structural/materialist filmmaking of the 1970s.

But one of the reasons I wanted to use music in such a prominent way in this work was an observation that nature documentaries are very heavily scored. Often, musical score is used in a very heavy-handed way to add dramatic tension to particular scenes, implanting a human notion of filmic 'drama' onto the animal world. In this way, nature documentaries tend to be absurdly anthropomorphized, something that is abundantly evident in the soap-opera-like *Meerkat Manor* TV series.

In terms of a score, I wanted to use sounds which were alien or unfamiliar to nature documentaries and was thinking about the film *Images* (1972) by Robert Altman (shot in Ireland), which featured an amazing timbral score by composer John Williams and percussionist Stomu Yamashta. I wanted to feature a score that was not overly melodic, so I worked with percussionist David Lacey, an improvising musician who uses a lot of extended techniques. He recorded a bank of sounds that I could use to construct the score, which I made in collaboration with another musician Andrew Fogarty. I used music as another tool, a 'building block' in the construction of this video work, just as I would use a script, visual or field recordings. This has been a new departure for me, afforded through this project. Andrew also developed the electronic part of the score at the end of the work, made from a combination of manipulated field recordings of birdsong at Lough Lannagh and a synthesizer.



▲  
*The Known World* (video still)

Jennifer Brady was born in Dublin, Ireland (1983) and received an MA in Visual Arts Practices (First Class Honours) from the Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology (2010) and an undergraduate degree from the National College of Art and Design, Dublin (2005). She has exhibited widely in Ireland, including recent solo shows in Mermaid Arts Centre, Dublin (July 2011) and 126 gallery, Galway (2010), for *Tulca 2010* and screening of work in The LAB as part of the *Quantified Self* exhibition (2011). Selected group shows include *Public Gesture*, The Lab, Dublin (2010), *Flicks: The Cinematic in Art* curated by Clíodhna Shaffrey, the Highlanes Gallery, Drogheda (2009) and *Sounds Like Art*, Draíocht, Dublin (2009). She has presented artistic research at the *In These Troubled Times* project led by artist Jesse Jones, and recent awards include Arts Council Visual Arts Bursary (2011) and Travel and Training Award (2012). Her work has been purchased for the AIB art collection

*‘The melancholy came from a number of different places. The environment on and around a lake changes so much. One minute it’s a peaceful, pastoral and calming place, the next minute it’s wild and threatening, but most often there can be an air of loneliness about it. And that loneliness and sense of hidden depths comes through so often in folklore and myth.’*

**Tom Swift**

## **ACROSS THE LOUGH | THE PERFORMANCE CORPORATION**

*Across the Lough* is an intimate theatrical experience for an audience of three, who are ferried across Lough Lannagh by a boatman/performer on a small rowing boat. On this journey, the boatman and sole performer delivers a powerful monologue, which meditates on themes of life and death and includes abundant mythical references. The work was written by Tom Swift, directed by Louise Lowe and performed by Steve Blount.

### INTERVIEWER

You have been to the forefront of theatre-based public art. Would it be fair to say that our reading the practices of theatre has changed and developed hugely in the ten years since The Performance Corporation has been in existence?

### TOM SWIFT

Yes, I think the whole concept of what theatre is has changed and continues to change. I think there’s a lot of really exciting work going on. When The Performance Corporation started we didn’t have a clear plan, other than to try to make exciting work. Our move into site-specific work was somewhat driven by the fact that we had no money to rent out a venue. And once we got a taste for being ‘outside the box’ we began to ‘think outside the box’. Certainly, to the general non-theatre going public theatre is still Synge, Friel, Murphy, The Abbey, The Gate and the amateur drama scene. But the reality is that people are making all sorts of work





▲  
*Across the Lough (performance still)*

that has no relation to that classic 'write a play, put it on' model. We have people devising plays and performances as ensembles, we have people using their own life experiences and self-performing, we have crossovers between gaming and theatre, we have documentary theatre using anything from diaries to court transcripts as the basis for performance. We even have theatre where there are no performers, just the audience member and a pair

of headphones. So theatre has cross-pollinated with lots of art forms and ideas and the Irish theatre sector is very, very diverse.

#### INTERVIEWER

The spectacle of theatre – its movement, the confluence of reality and unreality – I find very beautiful visually and aurally. But sometimes, perhaps because it's not an art form don't I know well, the very unreality of theatre can be odd; observing the

labour of the production; the acting, the setting, the movement, the writing, the collectiveness of audience, it's all a feat in traditional theatre, but sometimes its pace can be too formalised for me. Is what you are interested in almost the opposite of this construct, in that the audience is not outside of a production, but inside the work?

#### SWIFT

Yes, very much so. I suppose with our work we're looking for 'naturally occurring theatre'. We want to mine occasions, social conventions and situations that are naturally theatrical – where there's a kind of interaction that makes sense as theatre, but is not inside a formal theatre building. In *Across the Lough*, my impression of getting in a boat and being rowed across a lake seemed very much like one of these instances. There's a kind of contract between oarsman and passengers, in just the way there is between performer and theatre audience. When we are making work, and when I personally am writing the work, I'm thinking about the audience, because the audience are characters in the work of The

Performance Corporation. That doesn't mean they have to 'participate' in that embarrassing way typical of some children's theatre, but it does mean the audience have to be aware that they are playing a role in the drama.

Our challenge is to make them understand that they are playing their role, while allowing them to feel comfortable with that, and making it clear where the boundaries we won't cross are... and the context also limits to how much we want them to engage. Of course you can't control the level of audience engagement, and sometimes it can be disruptive when the audience feels too comfortable (wanting to have a chat with the actor mid-play) but that unpredictability can also lead to beautiful and powerful moments.

#### INTERVIEWER

I imagine that when theatre is discussed in the public art context, there is an idea that there is a mass appeal of participatory performance. It's interesting that this work in Mayo was so quiet, intimate, almost poetic. The actor Steve Blount was perfectly cast. Can you talk a little about writing for

such closeness, for Steve, the Ferryman and the audience?

SWIFT

In terms of public art, I think the immediate reaction is to think about something that will reach the masses and give ‘bang for your buck’. But sometimes that’s a trap and leads to work that isn’t truthful and doesn’t properly respond to the environment and the community. When, I first visited Lough Lannagh I was drawn to the lake and the idea of show in a boat was almost immediate – one of those very simple, clean ideas that you wish you could have all the time!

Personally, the intimacy of the piece was partly a reaction to the previous play I’d written. That was a piece staged in a semi-derelict 9,000-seat sports arena in Washington, D.C. It was a hugely ambitious project with a huge venue and a large audience. But it was very challenging, too, and certainly there were moments where the personal connection between audience and performers got lost – and the words too, due to the huge echo in the venue. For *Across the Lough*, I

knew I would have an utterly captive audience – unless they decided to jump overboard!. Not a lot of words were needed. And this was reinforced when I interviewed some local older men in Castlebar. They had a way of telling their life story with incredible economy of words. And yet, reading between the lines, you could feel there were hidden depths of unspoken emotions, regrets, passions. Steve was always the actor we had in mind for *Across the Lough*. He looks the part, he’s physically tall and strong. He has great charisma, and yet he can play with those hidden depths of character so well.

INTERVIEWER

Who and what do you think of as formative in your writing decisions and practices?

SWIFT

This was very much a collaborative process with the director Louise Lowe and the actor Steve Blount. We did two ‘development days’ when we went out in a rowing boat in County Meath. The first time we had very few firm ideas in our heads – I was interested in the mythic stories that related to the experience of making a boat journey.

We all talked a lot while Steve rowed us round and round this small lake and we tried out a few approaches to storytelling. And we asked Steve to sing a song – the only one he seemed to know was ‘Do You Love an Apple’. And later on it seemed an absolutely perfect song for the piece – a kind of sea shanty with a dark underbelly.

I think that archetypal stories and legends are always a starting point for my work. There were swans in the lake in County Meath, and I had a memory of swans on Lough Lannagh, so that kind of led us down the avenue of looking at the Children of Lir. Then I went away and wrote a draft of the two central scenes in the piece, the two stories told by the boatman. We tried them out and they seemed to work – at least that’s what I was told.

INTERVIEWER

Prior to the production of *Across the Lake* for *Landmark*, you had written *Swampoodle*, which was really quite an epic achievement by all accounts. This was produced on a massive site in Washington, D.C. – a vastly different scale. I am interested in your thoughts

about scale, and the challenges of it for your writing.

SWIFT

Certainly it’s great to have a huge canvas to work with. Theatre should have an element of wonder and surprise, and if you can take people into a huge space, especially one they haven’t been in before, then you’ve got a head start on the wonder front. For *Swampoodle* that scale certainly seemed to work in emphasising one of the themes of the play, which was the smallness of individual human endeavour and existence when placed against the backdrop of history.

INTERVIEWER

*Across the Lake* was melancholic and yet soothing; there were references to a shortness of time, death, suicide, failure, the loss of male identity through migration and our relationship with nature – all pertinent to the underside of contemporary life. Our relationship with nature is complex. The paradox of a real need for urban spaces which are close to rural environments seems fascinating. Can you talk about the social and geographic contexts of the commission and this sadness?

## SWIFT

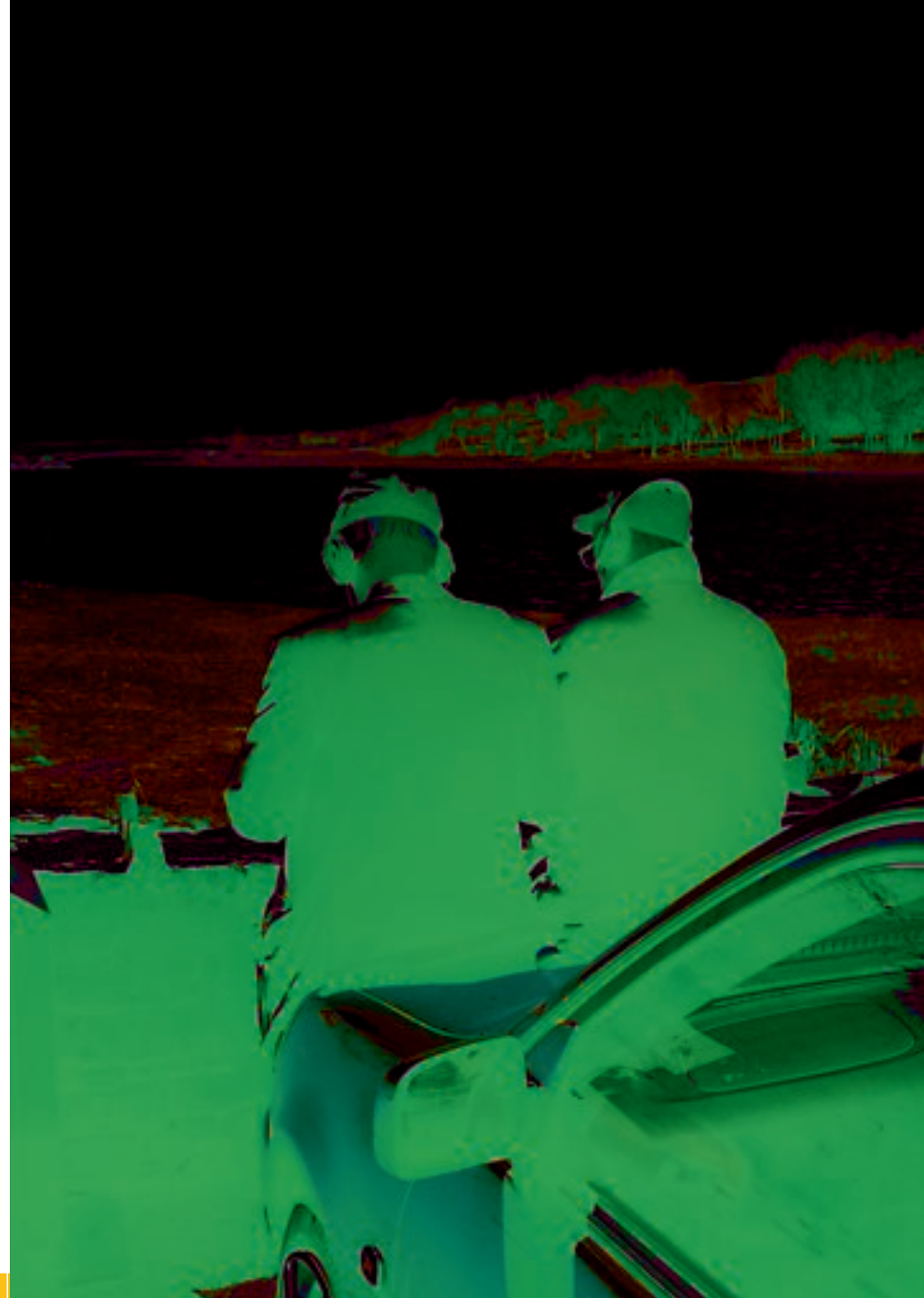
The melancholy came from a number of different places. The environment on and around a lake changes so much. One minute it's a peaceful pastoral and calming place, the next minute it's wild and threatening, but most often there can be an air of loneliness about it. And that loneliness and sense of hidden depths comes through so often in folklore and myth. When I was researching for the play, there were far more dark and tragic stories coming through than I expected.

Like every attempt at creativity, writing the play was about gathering

and weaving disparate strands into something new. These strands were encountered either through personal experience and concerns, local research, stories I was told about the lake, and myths I already knew. So you have the Children of Lir, which is a deeply sad story, the Greek legend of Charon the boatman of dead souls (death again), life stories told me by older men and women about their life experiences (taking the boat to England and all that entailed) and then you have the silences of the boat journey, which I hope gives the audience a rare chance to reflect, think, experience a moment away from life's hectic demands.

The Performance Corporation was founded in 2002 by Jo Mangan and Tom Swift with a mission to create 'daring performance adventures in surprising places'. We base our work on big ideas, rigorous physicality, razor-sharp writing, thrilling visuals and the sheer joy of discovering new dramatic possibilities across all art forms and media. We like to take risks and create work where others fear to tread. We have jumped off the towering sand dunes on Ireland's Atlantic coast, tip-toed through the Gothic halls of Edinburgh's Old Medical School, electrified a crumbling sports arena in Washington, D.C, driven at top speed through Dublin's dangerous docklands, and danced a dance in the shadow of a tree in a Kenyan fishing village. We also host The SPACE Programme, a multi-arts research and development residency at our base in Castletown House, Co. Kildare. And we're also hatching plans for Big House, a site-specific arts festival to be held in Castletown in 2013.

*Across the Lough (Audio Installation still). >*



*‘We are responsive, we absorb spaces and people and ruminate on and with them to develop our ideas. And the alternative to public art is private art, which doesn’t sound at all appealing to us’.*

**Rob & Matt Vale**

## **LOUGH LANNAGH RIPPLES | ROB & MATT VALE**

*Lough Lannagh Ripples* was a choreographed performance with light and sound on the new bridge at Lough Lannagh. Having worked in collaboration with students from St Gerald’s school, Davitt College and members of the Mayo Concert Orchestra, this carefully orchestrated light display was created by the subtle, repetitive gestures of its large cast whose cumulative movement created a stunning audio-visual experience. The performance was filmed and featured in the *Landmark* programme as an outdoor projection.

### INTERVIEWER

The works you make are highly interactive, and you often involve large groups of people in realising them. A surge in participatory practices, shifting the role of viewer as passive spectator to that of active participant and producer has been one of the hallmarks of twentieth-century art. How would you describe the participatory aspect of your working processes and its role within your practice in general?

### R & M VALE

The participation aspect is critical to our practice. Wherever possible we look to work with others to generate the artworks themselves, and to try to avoid a separation of workshop activity from final piece. If you look at many of our works they simply wouldn’t exist without participation from the outset – *The Penny Drops*, *oor to door*, and especially *Lough Lannagh Ripples* – these projects start as an idea

that requires participation. You can make them in your head quite easily, but it's about putting everything in place to allow people the opportunity to participate, then hoping that they do. I hope that our work encourages an interaction with artwork and technology that is not passive, that allows true involvement in a one-off event.

#### INTERVIEWER

There is an exciting tension within your work between the large scale of the projects and the relatively simple gestures and actions enacted within them, which cumulatively produce a high impact. For *Lough Lannagh Ripples*, this impact was produced by the collective action of performers on the bridge, yet it avoided spectacle. Are these considerations in relation to scale and spectacle important within your work?

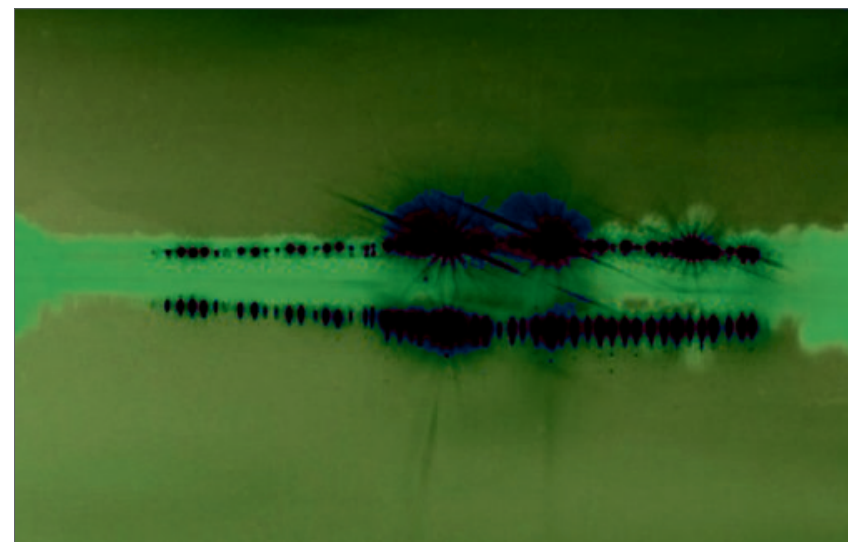
#### R & M VALE

I think they are, yes. There are elements of spectacle when the work gets very large – inevitably when pieces require large numbers of projectors and sound systems, road closures, street diversions and so on, the sense

of scale escalates. The key for us, though, is trying to produce something for and of its surroundings that develops through an interaction with that space specifically. So for *Lough Lannagh*, whilst the space is large, the experiences people have there are smaller. We liked the gentle ripples across the lake surface, the interplay between the mountain beyond and the circular walk, and wanted to create something that referenced these elements. We loved the idea of all of these individuals creating a very small gesture, which through repetition became large, but gentle. Other spaces can take great spectacle and scale, as they have this about their character, so we work with what we find.

#### INTERVIEWER

I am interested in how your work often culminates in unique, one-off events, which draw large audiences – gatherings of sorts. As these works are temporary, lived experiences, their legacy forms part of the collective memory. To what extent does this notion of 'gathering' and collective experience factor into your thinking?



^  
*Lough Lannagh Ripples (performance still).*

#### R & M VALE

It's a key part of our practice that the experience of the works is what matters, and that this is a shared experience. We're often asked how it feels, given that the artworks we produce predominately last for about 15 minutes and are then gone, but I think that's part of the appeal. You are working in the present for the next piece, and once a work has happened it exists as recorded footage, but mostly

it exists as a memory of something you saw, something you were at with others. It can take months to create some of the works, and there is a huge sense on our side of the importance of getting that 15 minutes right, because you often only get one chance, but I think the audiences feel some of that sense of the one-off as well. We'll spend a lot of time trying to think about where an audience will be, how they'll stand next to one another, what view

they will get of the work, and these things will really impact on the piece. The angle of the torches in the Ripples piece, for example, was choreographed to work based on where the largest part of the audience would be. It's wonderful to gather people together for a shared event, often to experience a space they already know in a wholly different way, and what we aim for is that the next time they pass by that place, they remember how they saw it when it became one of our artworks.

#### INTERVIEWER

Recently, you made another work, *Taunton Stop Line Live*, in Somerset, which illuminated some of the 300 military bunkers built during World War II that create the Taunton Stop Line. Many of your works literally shine a light on forgotten or overlooked landmarks, sites and structures, as well as on wholly familiar buildings. Can you talk a little about your engagement with the built environment through technology?

R & M Vale

I think what the projectors and technology allow you to do is to physically interact with, to morph and change a space without causing

damage to it, or having to hang things off it and so on. Interestingly, for the projection work it's often as important what buildings surround a potential site as the site itself, as these have to house all the equipment, so the whole lay of the land becomes key. The works often happen after dark as well, when buildings take on different functions, or are sleeping, and we come and wake them up again as something completely new. *Taunton Stop Line Live* was an incredible project for us, not least because the physical effort of projecting on 100 pill boxes in ten days was hugely daunting, but what was really interesting was the sense of pilgrimage involved – we would locate these little buildings on maps or GPS by day, then at night would push our equipment in a buggy to them, often accompanied by a little group of observers, and we'd all be stood there in a farmer's field as this little concrete box was illuminated for 5 minutes out of the dark, with a little bit of its past life and message projected on it. They were really intimate one-off experiences, linked together through the work.

#### INTERVIEWER

You work in collaboration with one another on the overlapping elements of sound, visual, and in the case of *Lough Lannagh Ripples*, choreography. Can you expand a little on this primary collaboration between each other as artists?

R & M VALE

I think that because Matt and I are brothers, we have a shorthand way of approaching projects, where we can look at them and bring our different thoughts and styles together based on our backgrounds. I'll throw an idea out without necessarily knowing if it can be done, and Matt's brain will go into technical mode and I'll get a sense from his expression of whether we're just asking for trouble or whether this kernel of an idea can grow into a real thing. That can happen the other way round too. But I think the main thing is that we have different skills that we know we can draw on to create work. Our sister, Alice is a choreographer and dancer, our other sister Ella is an actress, director and writer, so as we are looking at projects we might think, 'Let's choreograph some movement

within this piece' or 'let's set this work to a poetry-based underscoring' and we know we can produce that 'in-house', if you like. We all do it and it's a real asset, as it opens up possibilities before you've settled on an idea. For Matt and I, it's sort of second nature now. It's hard to pull a piece into the bits he does and the bits I do; Matt tends to lead on musical composition and I guess I lead on visuals, but not always, and we know what the other will do and how, so it works well.

#### INTERVIEWER

Finally, British journalist Jonathan Jones has decried public art as 'a production line for boring art, and mavericks have no place in its dreary ethic.' How would you respond to this statement? What are the key aspects of working in the public realm, that makes it rich and vital territory?

R & M VALE

I don't believe that 'boring art' stems out of the fact that it's public, I think it arrives from those involved not being creative or looking at a project in a new way. If by 'maverick' he means someone who intentionally sets out to alienate, to work in isolation and to

cause controversy, then of course this is likely to be difficult to square in a fully public environment, because there are stakeholders involved who will have to pick up the pieces afterwards. Artists who want to show their work to others in any form are in a sense public artists, and if they want a response from the public to their work, then they need to encourage that public to make it clear that they are welcome to respond to the work. This doesn't in any way mean that you should produce something that bows to the lowest common denominator, but it does mean that barriers to engagement shouldn't be thrown about for the sake of it. I think that there is a certain level of hiding bad art behind a wall of 'I don't care what you think' or 'you won't understand it'. People do understand if invited to see. Asking 80 people to stand on a bridge and wave torches around in the rain could, if not explained, sound like a fairly alienating conceptual work, but for those who were encouraged to take part and view the concepts behind it, the work became, I hope, self-explanatory. For us, we are responsive, we absorb spaces and people and ruminate on and with

them to develop our ideas. And the alternative to public art is private art, which doesn't sound at all appealing to us.

Rob Vale is one half of Illuminos, with his brother Matt, creating visually inventive, memorable artworks and experiences. Their practice is inherently collaborative and cross-disciplinary. Whilst their work incorporates new digital media and complex equipment, they are interested in combining these new technologies with notions of the curio, the Victorian penny machines or Edwardian automata, visual wonders and spectacles that amused, engaged and intrigued. Recent works such as *The Penny Drops/Ca fait Tilt or Kaleidoscope* and *Time and Tide* seek to recreate and elevate this visual experience for the contemporary society through digital means. They seek to create work that is a representation of spaces, visual poems that coax the viewer into considering a place, playing with their expectations.

Previous works where this can be seen include a symphonic film capturing the thoughts and feelings of community musicians in a church in Barnsley (*Orchestra*, in collaboration with Dominic Moore) the beauty, magic and majesty of Tatton Park sewn together through dance in *Le Ballet De Cour*, or the spectacular 100-metre projection of hundreds of participants and their front doors on the Le Mans Crescent in Bolton (*door to door*). Brought up in Derbyshire, and coming from a creative family (one of their younger sisters is an actor, the other a choreographer) they pursued the arts via degrees in music and fine art respectively.

Matt went on to study lighting and sound at Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in London, and Rob undertook an MA in Contemporary Fine Art Practices at Leeds Met, and worked as Digital Fine Art Lecturer at Lancaster University for three years, and as Arts Projects Manager for Lime, in Manchester. They have exhibited internationally in France, the US and Ireland, and were nominated for the 2010 Northern Arts Prize.

*‘My public art work over the past seven years has opened up a new expressive and conceptual world to me, one which I think has great communicative, musical and even social potential.’*

**Ian Wilson**

## **STILL LIFE IN GREEN AND RED | IAN WILSON**

Over the period of about a year, Ian Wilson set about collecting snippets of speech and recording conversations which offered examples of optimism. His travels brought him to places like Ballintubber, Partry, Glen, Ballindine, Mayo Abbey, Glen Abbey, Balle and Tourmakeady. Interested in how people were responding to the economic fall, he particularly wanted to talk with people making positive and proactive choices, and to record their responses to the changes they were experiencing. The work included a soundtrack featuring recorded interviews with local people speaking about the mood in the county and the austere economic climate. Part music, part sound art, part poetry, the result is a surprisingly optimistic snapshot of everyday life in Co. Mayo. The seven movements of *Still Life in Green and Red* was performed at Knock Shrine, a school in Claremorris, in Ballintubber Abbey and at Lough Lannagh.

### INTERVIEWER

Music is a highly social and primary language; is also one which offers both private and public resonances. It seemed to me that this was addressed in the various strategies you brought to the residency and final work. What were the dimensions and interplay between the found or recorded sounds and those that you have composed?



**Free Concert**  
**Ceolchoirm saor**

composed especially for County Mayo as part of Mayo County Council's 'Landmark' Public Art Programme  
Cumtha go speisialta ag Ian Wilson do Chontae Mhaigh Éo mar chuid den chlár ealaíne poiblí 'Landmark' de chuid Chomhairle Contae Mhaigh Éo

**in Green & Red**  
**The Contempo Quartet**

Jordan O'Sullivan  
Iain Ní Riada  
Andrea Bianchi-Martin  
Adrian Mantu-Caru

The 'New Green & Red' is a project which is a living quartet of music inspired by the people and spirit of County Mayo. The 'Life in Green & Red' is a tribute to those who have lived in the county for 40 or more years and who have made a difference to the county's history and culture. (Cmteoir Mhaigh Éo: [www.mayoarts.com](http://www.mayoarts.com))

**Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> October**  
**Ballintubber Abbey, 8pm**  
**Dé Domhnaigh 16**  
**Deireadh Fómhair ag 8i.n.,**  
**Mainistir Bhaile an Tobair.**

**T: 094 904 7561 or 094 904 7558**  
**E: [mayoarts@mayococo.ie](mailto:mayoarts@mayococo.ie) or [gseville@mayococo.ie](mailto:gseville@mayococo.ie)**  
**Booking required**  
**Caithfear áit a chur in áirithe**

▲  
Still Life in Green and Red (promotional poster)

## WILSON

A very important element in this work was my collaboration with computer-music composer Stephen McCourt, who made the soundtrack for the work using my suggestions and recordings as guidelines. Working with Stephen enabled a sophisticated treatment of the recorded interviews and field recordings I made. Once the soundtrack was complete I then wrote the music, which the quartet plays live along with the soundtrack and, with seven movements involved, I allowed myself to use a broad range of approaches, from the more personal, intimate kind of writing closer to some of my 'non-public art' work (the first two movements, for instance) to a more 'public' approach which incorporates well-known tunes, such as in the third and final movements. In this way I get to satisfy my own artistic needs as well as bearing in mind that the public needs to feel it has been included in the work's evolution.

## INTERVIEWER

How to you address the duality of a role like resident composer? Its role is social and public, when creativity

is so privately centred. The residency brief seems to have had an ambition to include your presence, ideas and responses to the geographic and social changes in certain areas in Mayo.

## WILSON

One allows me to do the other, really. The intention is to involve local people from wherever I work as a public artist in the making of the piece of music – not in terms of them having a direct musical or conceptual input, but rather, in this case, by focusing on what interviewees have to say on the theme of the project ('Optimism' in this instance) and then finding a way to bring parts (or in one case all) of those interviews into the work. That mostly worked in the Mayo piece by finding appropriate fragments – stand-out phrases or sentences – which encapsulated the essence of what the interviewee is saying. I then created what I thought was a suitable and appropriate musical context for those fragments to be heard in, which meant thinking in terms of an overall musical mood and then working from there. The text fragments are important,

but the music has to work as well; otherwise it's just wallpaper.

#### INTERVIEWER

*Still Life in Green and Red* covered an arc of references from the rebel song 'Sean South from Garryowen' to the Fukushima nuclear power plant disaster. You grew up at a time and in a place when there was huge division in Ireland. Has this influenced your work and working interests?

#### WILSON

Surprisingly not, or at least in no conscious way I'm aware of. The thing that actually politicized me far more than growing up in the North (if anything, that made me a liberal and open person) was living in Yugoslavia at the time of the Kosovo war; suddenly finding yourself in a place where world media and NATO attention was focused was a sobering experience.

#### INTERVIEWER

As one of Ireland's most successful composers working in public contexts – for example, you have had public art commissions in Wexford, Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown, Donegal, etc., and a range of settings from hospital units to youth orchestras; your

compositions have been performed in the Royal Albert Hall, Carnegie Hall, the Proms, the Venice Biennale, etc. – you are communicating with really diverse audiences, all with varying musical experience. Can you talk a little about this and your relationships with musicians and the audience?

#### WILSON

At the root of all this activity is a desire to keep composing, to keep trying new things and not to repeat myself. I have a restless imagination, which is sometimes too ambitious for my own good, but then sometimes that's how my most interesting and unusual works get made – blind ambition. My public artworks are where I do consider the audience because those works need to have some concrete points of relevance to people. In other works I tend (selfishly!) to think only of myself and what I want to hear in a new work – that's usually all the encouragement I need. Of course, some commissions have more specific briefs than others and so certain criteria perhaps come into play, but I usually have enough freedom to express myself.



ConTempo Quartet in rehearsal

Having been a professional composer for nearly 25 years now, I count myself very fortunate to have a number of good friends who are musicians, people I like to write for, people who like to play my music, and people who are fun to hang out with. This is one of the biggest joys of being a composer, that developing of rewarding, strong, long-term artistic relationships, and it's ongoing, which is very exciting. I have friends who are writers, poets and visual artists as well as performing musicians.

I will just say that my public art work over the past seven years has opened up a new expressive and conceptual world to me, one which I think has great communicative, musical and even social potential.

#### INTERVIEWER

*Still Life in Green and Red* has seven movements, each with their own 'texts'; Church, Art, Parade, School, Meditation, Trains and GAA. It is compelling how you have edited and arranged the recorded speech of the

participants. You were bringing forth the voice and reincorporating it into your composition, almost working as editor or director. Can you talk about this? Are you interested in literature and film?

WILSON

I am very interested in both literature and film, but not in the sense that I feel they influence how I compose. What I am also interested in is music theatre, and perhaps this is where the more 'dramatic' approach to the use of 'found' (or 'elicited', perhaps) texts comes from in some recent works. Actually, the first piece I used this approach in was my *Double Trio* from 2008, the result of a one-year public art residency in the Glencullen area of Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council. I realised then that it's a fantastic way to incorporate real people, their thoughts and ideas into a piece of music, which is normally much more abstract. For so many years it was visual art which cornered the public art arena (and it still does, but there's much more scope for other artforms to get involved now). I feel very strongly that for a piece of public art to have meaning for the inhabitants

of whatever area it's situated in, those people must recognise something of themselves in it, and perhaps even know that some of them participated or fed into the genesis and development of that work. This way I have of interacting with people in my public artworks is the best way I know of involving them, and if I had done the same research in a different part of the country, the resulting piece would have sounded completely different – that's a testament to Mayo, and to any place I work like this in.

INTERVIEWER

Is there a particular school of twentieth-century composition that you are influenced by, e.g. minimalism, neo-classicism, neo-romanticism, serialism?

WILSON

No, not really. I have always had a very broad musical taste, incorporating everything from rock and indie to jazz, contemporary classical and much else besides. There are certain principles of taste, balance, colour and drama I always try to bring into play, but beyond that I try to always write music which feels 'true' to me.

**Ian Wilson has written nearly one hundred works, including chamber operas, concertos, string quartets, a range of orchestral and chamber music and multimedia pieces. His compositions have been performed and broadcast on six continents, and presented at festivals including the BBC Proms, Venice Biennale and Frankfurt Book Fair, and at venues such as New York's Carnegie Hall, London's Royal Albert Hall and Vienna's Musikverein.**

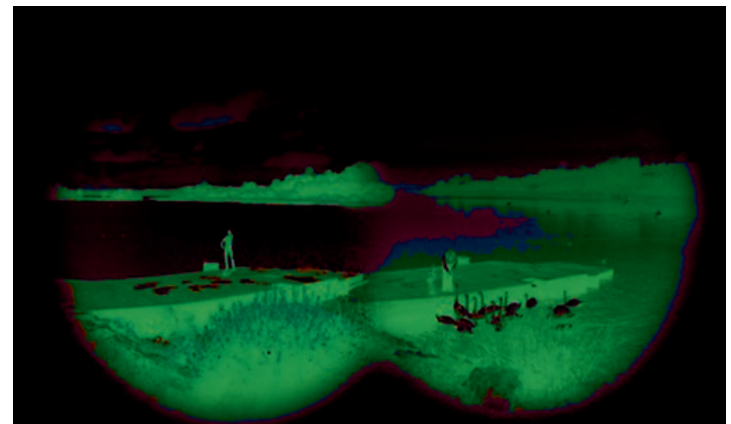
**He is a member of Aosdána, Ireland's state-sponsored body of creative artists, and in recent years has been AHRB Research Fellow at the University of Ulster, Composer-in-Association with California's Camerata Pacifica ensemble and *An Foras Feasa* Post-Doctoral Research Fellow at Dundalk Institute of Technology. From 2010 to 2013 he is Associate Composer with the Ulster Orchestra. His music is published by Ricordi (London) and Universal Edition.**

*'All of our installations are about some shift in normal perception, and this almost always means taking something away: show only what moves; show only what is still; show only 13 points of the body; show only surfaces. It's interesting to think that this is a strictly artistic strategy: a scientist would always think about what he could add in order to augment perception, to expand our mental capacities, or to extend the body in some way.'*

Cleary & Connolly

## ON SIGHT | CLEARY & CONNOLLY

*On Sight* is an installation of four permanent video/sculptural works at Lough Lannagh exploring the principles of binocular vision and human perception. Taking the form of viewing posts, each sculpture features a video tableau of the lake made for the left and right eye which, though filmed from the same position, include differing visual information, which the brain tries to consolidate into a stereo image. The resultant images are both haunting and beguiling.



▲  
*On Sight* (video still)

## INTERVIEWER

The artist Michael Fortune mentioned that he remembered some of your early work as being performance- or action-based disruptions in galleries and institutional spaces. This is so interesting, as many of your more recent works in public spaces provide structures and frameworks that offer little moments of disruption which encourage us consider to be in a place differently. Can you talk through your thoughts about introducing these devices and technologies into public places?

## CLEARY &amp; CONNOLLY

Michael has a long memory! *Touchy* seems like a century ago now. We were cheeky little runts (though far too old to be runts) running around getting thrown out of museums and upsetting all the nice people. In fact, most of what we did in the '90s might be described as elaborate practical jokes: we tried to create a cheekily subversive anarchy in well-ordered institutions. Not exactly a career our parents would have been proud of, but we were young – relatively – and in true Debordian traditions, we rarely thought about the future.

Looking back now I suppose what still connects us with that work (should I be calling it work?) is that Debordian tradition of art as connection as opposed to commodity. We have never sold a work in our lives (apologies to anyone who has bought anything from us) but we have made a world of connections, not just with places, but with people. Visitors to our shows are never passive spectators, but participants. Participation has become the central notion of our artistic practice. We think of the works as 'observer-participation' projects: extracting moving bodies from the fixed place; transforming them into lines or dots or pure colour moving through the present moment. The one consistent technological element has been the camera, or rather the different strategies we have come up with for introducing cameras into places, into situations. In *Touchy*, it was a hidden camera in the museum; in *Le Boulevard*, it was camera zoomed onto the street from a balcony; in *Moving Dublin*, it was a steadicam wandering through the city; and in most of our recent installations, it's the fixed camera in the exhibition space, be

that a museum, a house interior or a lakeside.

## INTERVIEWER

The recent books *In the Mind's Eye* and *Musicophila*, neurologist Oliver Sacks addresses the human experiences of sight and sound. He is interested in dimensions of perception, particularly they are absent or distorted. You have been working with a public research laboratory in Paris specialising in the experimental and development psychology of perception philosopher, Merleau-Ponty, whose works centred on perception as a total experience and who was acutely aware of the failure of science in its regard of this totality. At *Landmark* you spoke about engagements you have made with scientists. Have these connections thrown up some interesting mutual absences and perceptions?

## CLEARY &amp; CONNOLLY

In fact I'm reading *The Mind's Eye* right now, and I'm amazed that we made *On Sight* without having read it. Sacks always starts with brain damage, and the struggle to find a way to live with it and bypass it. All of our installations are about some shift in normal

perception, and this almost always means taking something away: show only what moves; show only what is still; show only 13 points of the body; show only surfaces. It's interesting to think that this is a strictly artistic strategy: a scientist would always think about what he could add in order to augment perception, to expand our mental capacities, or to extend the body in some way...

I don't know Merleau-Ponty well, I'm afraid, but I would follow Deleuze's idea that there is no primacy between the three disciplines (philosophy, art and science) that we use to explore reality. It was amazing to think when we first started working with scientists a few years ago, it was the scientists who came looking for us. Thi-Bich Doan from the College de France was looking for artists who were interested in collaborating with scientific researchers. From her point of view, researchers had much to learn from artists' less rigorous way of thinking: scientists could think vertically or laterally, but they found it difficult to do both at the same time.

It has been so interesting to discover how real scientific research is done.

They work with incredible patience, content to add a comma to a sentence that has been composed by a collective effort over decades. I am sure it is that patience that makes this a scientific and not an artistic age. On the other hand, once we got to know some of them, we were surprised to see how much frustration that slow development causes them, and how much they admired the free flow of ideas that art can liberate. When we first planned on working with ideas that had come from Patrick Cavanagh's work, we had our doubts that a professor from Harvard directing a perception laboratory for the CNRS would be interested in working with little known artists like ourselves. But when we called him, he came over to see us the very next day!

#### INTERVIEWER

Having worked in a range of public contexts – Paris, London and Dublin, but also in Irish towns and cities such as Tallaght, Limerick, Tralee and Castlebar – and as you're both architects, I wanted to ask about your thoughts about the future and conditions of the Irish town for its citizens and users.

#### CLEARY & CONNOLLY

I suppose I have been thinking that is so interesting that ribbon and one-off housing developments in rural environments now challenge our development patterns, not from aesthetic perspectives, but with more basic challenges such as waste, water, transport, energy, etc., and this is so relevant to towns in Mayo and places such as Castlebar. I think a comparison between French and Irish towns of similar scale can be very telling with regard to your question. French towns really do huddle around; as you're driving through the countryside you can see them on the horizon, the houses gathered like a herd of animals almost. At home you almost don't see a town arrive, it sneaks up on you with just one house, then a couple more, or maybe an estate, and then they're all on top of you. I think this is because in fact we are an utterly unpragmatic people, and so the imaginary notion of the home, that sense of independence, of spreading out and having space around you is so much more important than the practical issues of drain lengths. I love this way of being; clearly, of course, drain lengths shouldn't in

any way influence the choice of location of your home, but a certain amount of pragmatism does lead to a more ordered environment. At the same time, the French pragmatic spirit is very repressive with regard to creativity. We would never have got to do a project like *On Sight* in France, quite simply because we hadn't ever done it before, so they couldn't be 100 per cent sure that it would work.

#### INTERVIEWER

At the time of the launch of your artworks at *Landmark* programme you also had a major exhibition curated by Vincent O'Shea, *Hall of Mirrors* at Farmleigh in Dublin. There was a work titled *Lough in a Box* which has viewing points on four sides. It is a suspended packing crate into which the viewer peers at the panorama of the lake. In this context, with its mode of display, the viewer is as a voyeur of nature, which it seems to me is commoditised and packaged. A similar film is installed in the park; here, the four filmic vignettes literally mirror the position of the camera. And in this context the films work as layering, which disrupts the senses and provides a heightened

immersion in nature. I am really interested in this tension and viewers' experience of context.

#### CLEARY & CONNOLLY

The *Lock-in-a-Box* is certainly packaged: the OPW built us a beautiful crate that we suspended in the long gallery at Farmleigh, with all the mirrors and screen set up inside, and four pairs of lenses on the four sides of the box inviting spectators to experience our binocular experiment with Lough Lannagh. It's a very different experience to what is offered to people walking around the lake. For one thing, there is no real lake to look up at. In Castlebar, it's the moment they take their eyes away from the lenses and look at the world in front of them that most people told us the installation 'wrecks your head' (which I now understand is a compliment in the West). The box is a sort of foldable travel kit of the *On Sight* project, with no view of the real lake to look up at, more like the stereoscopes you would have found in Victorian living rooms with photographic views of Niagara Falls, except that the two video scenes challenge the eyes to make a converging stereo image from their

repetitions and contradictions. As for ‘commoditised’, well, I’m just going to have to take offence. How dare you accuse us of trying to sell our art!

#### INTERVIEWER

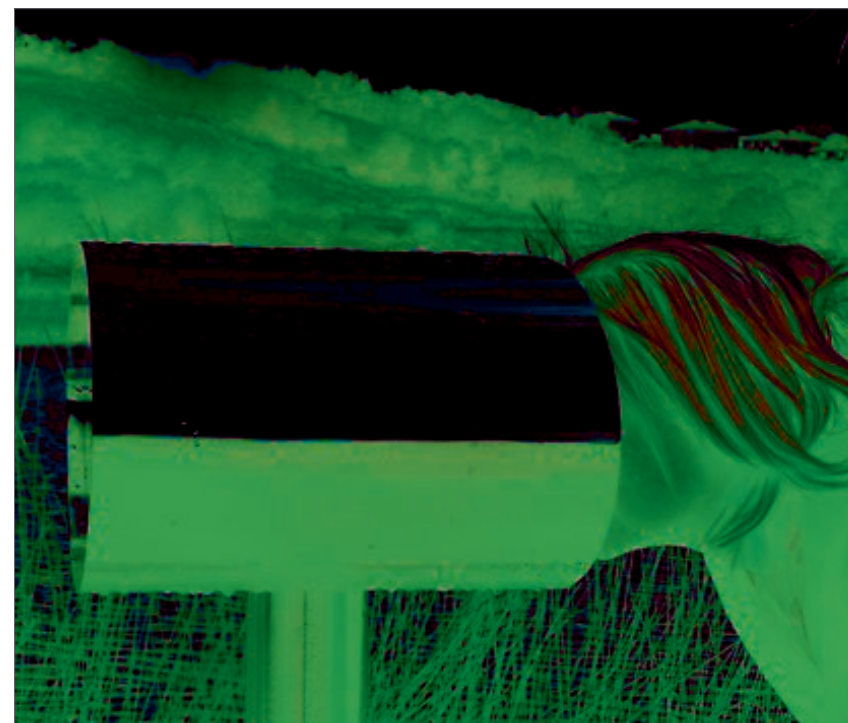
There are few mid-career architects in Ireland such as Dominic Stevens, Tom de Paor, Gráinne Shaffrey, who are making really interesting interventions and dialogues between the traditions and problematic of visual arts and the built world. Mayo County Manager Peter Hynes also an architect, and has a background visual culture that is notable in terms of the value he has clearly placed in the arts. To me your practice shows an interest in mobility and engagement; even your manipulation of film could be read as being taking up aspects of this space too.

#### CLEARY & CONNOLLY

Certainly, when we look back on our last few years, we have connected with so many other disciplines – with dance, with computer programming, with urbanism, with education, with perceptive science – and to be honest, we almost see it as a problem, especially in France where, as you know, they expect you to stick to

your own discipline. There are video artists who work with dance, but only with dance; there are artists with architectural backgrounds who make architectonic installations; there are artists who specialize in participative workshops; there are artists who describe their work as ‘art-science’... We are often introduced into these *milieux*, and often we look (or at least we feel) like dilettantes because we don’t do *only* that. It’s not only in France. People always ask us why we never participate in festivals like *Ars Electronica* in Linz, a massive convention of electronic artists. But even if they were interested in our partly electronic work, what would be the interest for us?

It’s refreshing to see how much more receptive this country is to multi-disciplinarity. A project like *On Sight* would never have gotten out of the blocks in France. We would have explained that we wanted to explore the landscape using binocular vision, and someone on the jury would have asked, ‘Have you ever worked with binocular vision before? Have you ever worked with the landscape before?’



▲  
On Site Installations

Here we found Gaynor Seville, who believed in the project from the very beginning and supported it all the way through. If we propose a similar project in France next year, we will be able to

answer ‘yes’ to the questions above, and maybe it will happen, in which case we will have Mayo County Council to thank.

Anne Cleary and Denis Connolly both studied Architecture in Dublin in the 1980s, before moving to Paris in 1990. Their work combines elements of performance, documentary, experimental film, installation, writing and photography. They have developed a practice which they call 'observer participation', bringing the public and other collaborators into works that they call 'entanglements'. This has led them into partnerships with musicians, dancers, writers and teachers. They have become filmmakers, writers, photographers and even computer programmers.

In 2006 they created *HereThereNowThen* at LCGA in Limerick using the observer participation principle. These installations travelled widely before being regrouped for an exhibition entitled *Pourquoi pas Toi?* in the Centre Pompidou in Paris in winter 2008. A major public commission, *Moving Dublin*, brought them back to Dublin in 2006.

Their research often involves collaboration with public institutions. In 2008 they took part in a cycle of conferences with the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique CNRS in Paris entitled *Perceptions Art-Science*. In *Dance Ireland* in Dublin, in the Museum of Modern Art and the Centre Pompidou in Paris. Their work develops laterally, often evolving rapidly and taking many forms, responding to the particular and individual needs of each project and context. They believe that art should be at the service of society, and their work is a constant enquiry into contemporary social and cultural questions.

They were the winners of the AIB Art Prize in 2009.



▲  
On Sight, walking tour.

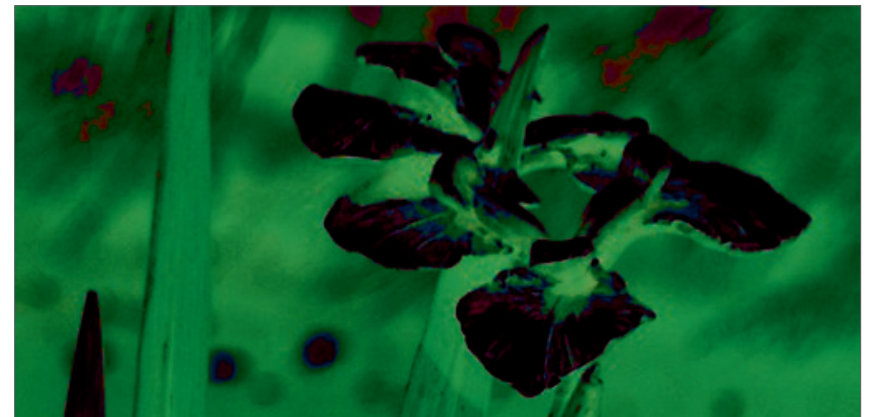


*“There is a lineage in tradition that engages me. I have an interest in objects and intense detail, and how those two things work symbiotically to go beyond the given image or impression. More often it is the positioning, juxtaposing, presentation or context for showing the work that lifts it out of the traditional”*

Elaine Griffin

## LANDMARKS | ELAINE GRIFFIN

*Landmarks* is a sculpture trail of permanent bronze artworks positioned around Lough Lannagh which have been created in response to specific histories of the area. These small-scale sculptural works reveal traces of Castlebar’s recent and distant past, including a piece of linen and a muller reminiscent of Castlebar’s linen industry and a replica of the hat believed to have been worn by General Humbert when he arrived into Castlebar in 1798.



^  
*Bronze installation based on local flora.*

## INTERVIEWER

I was interested to read on your website some of your thoughts on recent social and economic developments, which, you say, can place us in 'situations [or choices] that restrict, entrap and isolate us from our deeper selves'. What are your thoughts about the meaning and importance of public spaces in towns such as Castlebar, and the concept of the park itself?

## GRIFFIN

The quote you have selected relates directly to a body of work which I first showed in 2002, entitled *Arrested Development*. This body of work was a commentary on how I viewed the building boom in Ireland at the time and the spiralling consumerism that the then and current capitalist economic structure was fuelling. Everyone in Ireland was being pushed to buy their own home. By 2002 it was evident to me that this was out of control. A lot of people didn't get at the time what I was trying to say with this work. It depicted people trapped in concrete containers covered in rubble, restricted and contorted both physically and emotionally by the structure they

inhabited. The work has turned out to be extremely prophetic.

In general I think that the mass consumerism and capitalism which drives our current social and economic model does cause a lot of damage and restriction to people, while masquerading under a the banner of freedom and necessity. Often working off lower common denominators and feeding off insecurities, people are fodder for the market whether they realise it or not. In many ways we are really seeing where this model actually ends up, with what is happening economically today. I think public spaces in towns and cities are vital and offer us the counter and often the salve to the above. In many ways our access and engagement with public space, especially green space, is, I feel, an anchor in life. Public spaces are free and are one of the few places where we can participate freely. There is something very essential in that for the community and there appear to be less and less opportunities for that to happen in general in our society. That being said I think public spaces are challenging to engineer and it is very easy to make them overly contrived or

to develop them in inappropriate ways. I think there is a way to go in terms of how these spaces are envisaged and realised and there is a responsibility in managing, preserving and maintaining public space.

## INTERVIEWER

Your works in the *Landmark* programme are small in scale, little sculptures which punctuate the Lough Lannagh Walking Loop, making a trail. Can you talk a little about the decisions you made about the location of the works?

## GRIFFIN

From the creative point of view the site itself really offered the locations for the sculptures. The idea behind the work was to encourage connection and engagement in the users of the civic amenity on a broader platform, so each piece was situated in its place very intentionally – to highlight or draw attention to something specific either directly in that spot or to call the viewer's attention to something within their line of vision from standing at that location. This can be well understood in the example of the replica of General Humbert's hat. Apart from highlighting the

battle that took place in Castlebar, the positioning of the piece also draws attention to the original lake level, and the road that ran alongside it, before the lake level dropped from the building of a mill race. A lot of the pieces work this way, in that the piece itself illustrates something while its position points to something else. Conceptual considerations were balanced with choosing works and locations that would allow for a fairly even distribution around the walking loop. Again, some decisions for the location of work were affected by groundwork developments on site, so once the concept was nailed down, these issues formed the parameters for the choosing of locations.

## INTERVIEWER

Your practice involves a use and understanding of traditional sculptural materials and skills, such as casting; you do this in glass, bronze and china. Your practice is not necessarily realised in traditional forms. Your skill as a maker is apparent; when we spoke you mentioned that you are very interested in the process of casting.

## GRIFFIN

I would say that often my work *is* realised in traditional forms. There is a lineage in tradition that engages me. I have an interest in objects and intense detail, and how those two things work symbiotically to go beyond the given image or impression. More often it is the positioning, juxtaposing, presentation or context for showing the work that lifts it out of the 'traditional'. In many ways, the individual sculptures for this project could be read as traditional representations, but for me, they are more like interventions, interrupting the course of an ordinary and sometimes distracted or perfunctory walk, calling upon the walker to be here, now. I am very much a maker and making feeds my thinking practice. Making has suffered a lot over the past decades, with fine art practice focusing on the found object and concept more heavily. There is a lot of meaning, engagement and ownership for me in being able to conceive of and produce the work right through to installation. There are fewer people in a position to do that these days; lots of artists farm out the making of work.

## INTERVIEWER

The sculptures are representational of artefacts which relate to the archaeology, history and ecology of the location. Can you talk about the process of researching these objects, and in particular those you found to be complex socially or historical?

## GRIFFIN

The process of researching for this project was multifaceted and protracted. In order to research, I had to separate the individual elements or threads connected with the place, and seek out people, material or institutions with relevant information. These ranged from local historians, wildlife rangers, librarians and archaeologists to working with some of the national museums and exploring their collections. There was much more information available and gathered to use than what was selected in the end. I had to consider budget along with what components or elements lent themselves well to a visual representation or outcome, as well as what would be accessible to the public and fulfil the requirements which I had set out in terms of the concept overview

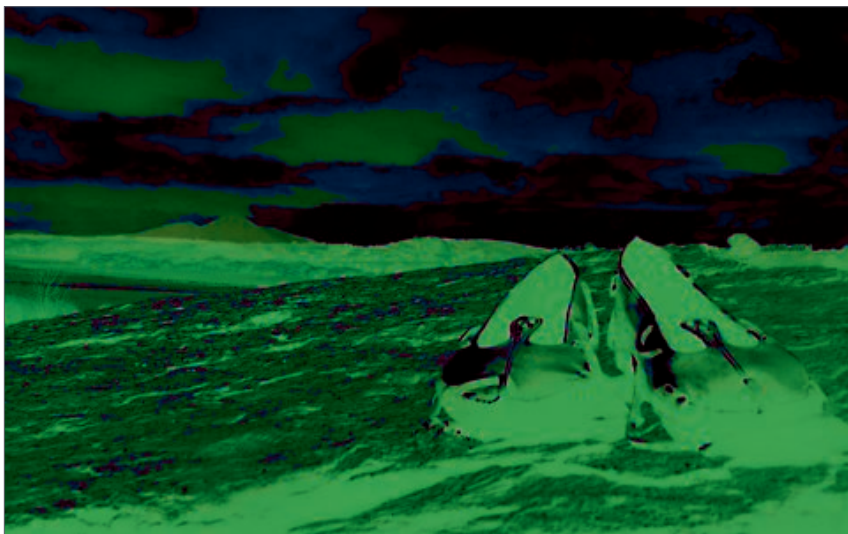
for the project. In addition, because there were seven different elements or works in the group, I had to make selections that considered the other components in the group, so that they all hung together when viewed as a collection rather than individually. In some cases the individual sculptures work symbiotically, like the medieval shoes and the contemporary footsoles and the circular ring fort dwelling and the ring fort plan overview. None of the objects were particularly complex socially. In historical terms, there was and always is the issue in local history of conflicting and various versions of events, functions and dates, etc. For the production of this work I very much aimed towards the most substantiated and verified examples of things, so as to offer the viewer as close to the fact and the history of the place as was available.

## INTERVIEWER

Would you agree with an observation of these works as totemic? Are these works reminding us of the vicissitudes of life? Can you talk a little about the meaning of some of the objects?

## GRIFFIN

It would be great if the works were viewed as totemic, but I'm not sure about that. For me they are totemic and were devised in many ways to be so. To be totemic suggests some collective awareness or acknowledgement of spiritual significance, and I'm not sure that as a whole, the viewers will make that level of association with the work, although I'm sure some of them will. In so far as they represent the spirit of the place they are most definitely totemic, and really, this is why these forms were selected and placed as they have been – to invite the viewer to consider the spirit of this place that has witnessed so many happenings over thousands of years. I'm a strong believer in conservation and how its success hinges on that deeper engagement with the land or the place. In many ways this links back to the first question on the importance of public spaces. I think a lot of public spaces get it wrong when they don't offer that invitation, which often serves to alienate the public. We've seen that a lot in the past with public art.



^  
Bronze installation based on medieval shoe.

Really these works are markers as to things both past and present on this site. For me, the term ‘vicissitudes’ carries with it a sense of loss or misfortune, which is not something these pieces are about. There is not a commentary on whether something was good or bad, or whether the past was better than the now. The focus is more on what has been or what is now, with the emphasis on calling the viewer’s imagination to envisage those things. Many of the objects were

intentionally selected because of their resonances with the human body or being, as a way into the concept of engaging and imagining. For example, the medieval shoes on top of the rock are of human scale. In the first instance, one can imagine wearing these on one’s own feet. After that initial engagement, their location draws the gaze up the lake, to where the crannog is situated. The hope is that the follow-on thoughts will move towards imagining what life was like

for the people who lived on that crannog and made and wore those shoes on this site thousands of years ago. The same would go for the reconstructed circular hazel-and-thatch house. Ultimately it’s about imagining living in that windowless smoky space, within the boundaries of the ring fort. Humbert’s hat is in stark contrast to these objects, with its opulent, decorative and foreign quality – a different snapshot in time, but from the same place. It is hoped that the objects, because they are more interventions than representations can facilitate a level of thinking that is deeper than just the notion of the mere replication of an historic object. To that end, it comes back around to the notion of being something totemic and spiritually significant.

Elaine Griffin lives and works in County Mayo. She has exhibited her work widely both in Ireland and Internationally. Her recent public commissions include works for Mayo VEC and Mayo County Council. Over the course of her career her work has been purchased and made for a number of state and private collections including Queens University, Dundalk UDC Municipal Collection, Kunstation Kleinsassen, Germany and the National Museum of Ireland.

She is a skilled maker working in various media, including glass, concrete, bronze and digital media. Elaine maintains a broad approach to realising artworks and is interested in practice contexts, her artworks are made in the mediums of print, sculpture, using glass, bronze, bone china, concrete and light, and digital media.

Elaine lecturers at NCAD. She has been shortlisted for inclusion in the prestigious Coburg Glass Prize, Germany and received the Liam Walsh Award. In addition to and alongside her studio practice she has developed a number of projects which have evolved from community centred engagements including work with Mayo Rape Crisis Centre, Mayo Women Support Services and MIA, Mayo Intercultural Action.

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