

PLANTING A SEED





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2015

Augustine O'Donoghue & Carol Anne Connolly

Cólaiste Íde agus Iosef Abbeyfeale Percent for Art Commission



Seed Savers Field Trip with Transition Year Art students, 2015

PLANTING A SEED / CONTENTS

page 6
Introduction

page 8
Planting a Seed & the Weak Power of Art in Education
by Glenn Loughran

page 14
Tree Donators

page 16
Sculpture

page 20
Students Field Trips

page 28
Woolstrophe Manor

page 32
Isaac Newton's Orchard

page 34
Light Installation

page 38
Thanks / bios

PREFACE

In October 2014, a public request was made for donations of apple tree branches from Abbeyfeale and the local area; branches which would be used to cast a bronze representation that would adorn the new foyer entrance at Coláiste Íde agus Iosef. Artists, Carol Anne Connolly and Augustine O’Donoghue, had just begun an interactive arts project, under the Percent for Art scheme and the race was on to find suitable branches before the Autumnal winds blew all the foliage from the trees.

The resulting sculpture is part of *Planting a Seed*, a culmination of a year long program of events that was developed by the artists, in collaboration with students, teachers, organisations and community members of Coláiste Íde agus Iosef to investigate ideas and encourage thought and discussion on education, art and science.

Inspiration for the project was taken initially from Isaac Newton, renowned physicist and mathematician, widely recognised as one of the most influential scientists of all time whose infamous, embellished or not, ‘eureka moment’ was central to the development of his theory of gravity.

The project began in Autumn 2014 with the process of creating a bronze sculpture of an apple tree, its fruit hanging precariously from the outermost branch, homage to an inspirational moment. Casts were taken from apple trees in the Abbeyfeale area forging a direct link to and between community, school and local environment.

In October 2015, the artists visited Woolsthorpe Manor in Lincolnshire, the birthplace of Newton and the place where he made his most important discoveries. There the artists were presented with seeds from the infamous 400 year old *Flower of Kent* apple tree to bring back to Abbeyfeale. Earlier in the year, an apple orchard was planted on the school grounds, consisting of Native Irish Heritage Apple varieties sourced by Irish Seed Savers from Cork, Kerry and Limerick the school’s catchment area – it was planted in the late Spring by students and, in time, Newton’s apple seeds will bear fruit in the *The Isaac Newton Orchard*.

Further interplay between art and science was created using Newton’s discoveries of the nature of light. In the science department of Coláiste Íde agus Iosef, a corridor with high windows span the length of the building. Here a light installation, composed of 30 glass dispersive prisms, was created on the high window sills. During the school year, in certain conditions when the sun shines, it sends a beam of light through the prisms and across the corridor to the opposite wall, producing spectrums of light.

For the artists, the most important element of the project involved working with a dynamic group of individuals from the school’s 2014/15 Transition Year class. A diverse and thought provoking programme of events was developed in order to introduce the students to the various processes by which art is made and to show how art encompasses numerous fields of enquiry. Workshops explored the techniques that were involved in the creation of the bronze sculpture, the light installation and the Isaac Newton Orchard. Students went on field trips throughout the year to the organisations that had a hand in developing all strands of the work, including a visit to Seed Savers: an environmental NGO in Co. Clare where the students learned about ecology issues and the continuous lifecycle of apples. A trip to Bronze Art Foundry in Dublin, where the sculpture was fabricated, illustrated to the students the vast amount of intricate work and craftsmanship involved in casting a bronze sculpture. Whilst a workshop by Physics lecturers in UCD, who aided in the design of the light installation, resulted in the students making their own Spectrometer, an implement used to measure light.

This publication presents the many facets of *Planting a Seed* that were developed over the year and its comprised seasons. An introductory essay by Dr. Glenn Loughran, offers a detailed picture of the project and the relationship between art and education and precedes a collection of images, stories and narratives of the generous tree donators and their trees which were recorded alongside the collection of each branch and apple and which provide another layer of local history surrounding the bronze cast sculpture. A further series of images gives insight to the overall project, the people involved and the resulting work.

PLANTING A SEED & THE WEAK POWER OF ART IN EDUCATION

GLENN LOUGHRAN

*Why sh[oul]d that apple always descend perpendicularly to the ground,
thought he to himself; occasion'd by the fall of an apple, as he sat in
contemplative mood'.¹*

The fascination of this story and the endurance of its legacy resides in the anomaly that one of the most important discoveries in scientific history is manifested during a spontaneous and banal moment of everyday life. Gone is the image of rigorous scientific labour performed around a chaos of methodological apparatuses, test tubes, bunsen burners. Instead we have the romance of the garden, the religious significance of the tree, the indulgence of leisure/contemplation. Until quite recently the actual story of the falling apple had been somewhat disputed as here say. Save for some minor comments by the French poet Voltaire on Newton's story and quite a bit of conjecture as to how it was embellished as Newton got older, there is little evidence to verify its happening. However, the publication of key Newtonian texts including a correspondence with his biographer Sir Willian Stukeley has provided some much needed proof. Released by the Royal Society in 2010, Stukeley's meticulously handwritten recollections shed new light on the scenario by recalling an after dinner conversation with Newton, where Newton suggested that 'he was just in the same situation, as when formerly the notion of gravitation came into his mind'.²

Although limited to such accounts, the story has nevertheless been cultivated into a mythical event in scientific discourse, an event that has resulted in the immortalisation of the actual *Malus Pumila* tree that Newton used to sit under, now historically protected and grafted to create clones of the original. Such investments in an anecdotal moment prompt further contemplation around the nature of interpretation and fact. With minimal evidence to support the event in the garden, it is possible that much of its enduring legacy resides in the poetic nature of its representation. Through the aesthetic lens the story implies that new knowledge is susceptible to both predictable and unpredictable events, and that any situation that produces change is beholden to an uncertain wonder in the world. In a similar vein enlightenment philosopher René Descartes (1596 –1650) argued that curiosity and wonder are the first moments of real passion and learning that we experience in life,

*when the first encounter with some object surprises us, and we judge it to
be new or very different from what we formerly knew, or from what we
supposed that it ought to be, that causes us to wonder and be surprised: and
because that may happen before we in any way know whether this object
is agreeable to us or is not so, it appears to me that wonder is the first of all
passions.³*

To encounter the wonder of the 'new' is at its most basic level the function of all education, from pre-school to university to old age, however, in the context of contemporary education there is much debate around the closure of the experience of 'wonder' and curiosity in the curriculum.

In a recent analysis of the 'language of learning' which dominates contemporary educational discourse, theorist Gert Biesta suggests that the current language of education is more concerned with efficiency and predictability, than it is with the wonder of the world. For Biesta, current educational values prioritise the instrumentality of scientific conceptions of knowledge against the contingency of interpretation and invention, that are particular to the arts and humanities. There are a number of problems with this scenario. One is how the discourse of scientific rationality is equated with the ideology of economic rationality, that is, with the formation of human capital in preparation for survival in an economically unstable world.⁴ Curriculum theorist Eliot Eisner suggests that such pressures can influence the school curriculum through three different orders, what he calls the *implicit curriculum*, the *explicit curriculum* and the *null curriculum*. Where the *explicit curriculum* defines the curriculum provided through standardized classes such as science, maths, technology, the *implicit curriculum* represents those values which are inadvertently absorbed through the *explicit curriculum*, such as the difference between failure and success. Outside of these two modes of organisation the *null curriculum* names those subjects and values which are excluded for one reason or another from the implicit and the explicit curriculum, it represents the "options students are not afforded, the perspectives they may never know much about, much less be able to use, the concepts and skills which are not part of their intellectual repertoire".⁵ In the current context the *null curriculum* is often represented by those subjects which struggle to compete with the logic of economic exchange, such as Art.

Arguing against the encroaching influence of economic modes of exchange on educational processes, Gert Biesta defends the idea of education as a form of relational exchange, because as W,B Yeats has put it, 'education is not about filling a bucket but about lighting a fire.'⁶ A similar sentiment was expressed by the Lithuanian philosopher Emmanuel Levinas when he wrote that in order to love properly, we need to be open 'to the beautiful risk of creation'.⁷ Exploring the link between risk and beauty in education, Biesta argues for their shared capacity to be 'disruptive' of social norms.

*to engage with the openness and unpredictability of education [...] means
to take this risk seriously [...] not because the risk is deemed inevitable, but
because without risk, education itself disappears and social reproduction,
insertion into existing orders of being, doing and thinking takes over.⁸*

The social dynamic of art has emerged in recent years within this educational context, engaging with these tensions and exploring new disciplinary dialogues. Referencing the historical significance of 'wonder' at the heart of Newtons story, the present installation, titled *Planting a Seed* represents a moment in this discussion where art, education, and science collide in an 'event of learning'. The three key elements which structure this installation frame key characteristics of contemporary art, such as: the social, the conceptual and the environmental.

Socially engaged art is an artistic process that places its emphasis on the active participation of the viewer in the making of art. Experienced a co-creative, such processes nurture a sense of ‘wonder’ through artistic and relational exchanges that are often slow, considered and contingent. Enabling what Grant Kester calls a ‘dialogical aesthetic’, these methodologies aim to deepen the experience of the work through the negotiation of complex relations with the local community. Exploring a similar set of concerns, the artists in the *Planting a Seed* installation constructed a series of creative engagements that linked the school community to the broader community, by inviting individuals to participate in the design of a large-scale orchard sculpture. The School orchard is a heritage apple orchard containing Irish heritage apple trees alongside apple trees grown from seeds in Isaac Newton’s garden in the U.k. Working with a direct descendant of Newton’s tree, called ‘The Flower of Kent’ the project has enabled a discussion with the custodians of Newton’s estate, who have agreed to support the orchard by donating seeds.

The Irish heritage apples that were chosen are apple trees that are native to Kerry, Cork and Limerick. Many of the students in the school come from these counties and collaborated in the planting of the orchard in the school grounds. Furthermore, these engagements were developed in collaboration with the Co. Clare based NGO Irish Seed Savers, whose main objective is the conservation of Ireland’s unique plant genetic resources, in particular apple trees. The students undertook two different workshops with the Irish Seed Savers. The first of these workshops was developed at their base in Scarrif, Co. Clare, where the students learned about food miles and apple tasting, they examined the shape, colour and taste of different Irish heritage apples as opposed to the standard shape, size and taste found in the supermarket. The second of these workshops was developed in the schools polytunnel’s where they grafted their own apple tree, which was taken home to grown in their own garden. Such exercises inspire a sense of wonder at a complex organic world that is becoming more and more standardised.

The organic complexity of such processes can be linked back to Newton’s own scientific processes, his attention to detail, but it also provides a link to one of the key figures in the emergence of Socially Engaged Art, German artist Joseph Beuys. Beuys is regarded for having developed an expansive practice that included both theoretical and artistic modes of production. These modes of production often combined to form hybrid performances and manifestos such as the 1973 text ‘I am searching for a field character’. In this text Beuys set out the parameters of a ‘social sculpture’ that would transgress arts traditional borders ‘in order to build A SOCIAL ORGANISM AS A WORK OF ART’, where ‘EVERY HUMAN BEING IS AN ARTIST’ (1973).

Creativity is not limited to people practicing one of the traditional forms of art, and even in the case of artists, creativity is not confined to the exercise of their art. Each one of us has a creative potential, which is hidden by competitiveness and success-aggression. To recognize, explore and develop this potential is the task of the School. Creation – whether it be a painting, sculpture, symphony or novel – involves not merely talent, intuition, powers of imagination and application, but also the ability to shape material that could be expanded to other socially relevant spheres.⁹

Emerging out of this social character of art was a unique attempt to blend the disciplines of art and education. At a time when to teach art was still to admit to failure as an artist, Beuys turned such romantic notions inside out, stating ‘To be a teacher is my greatest work of art’¹⁰. His conception of education as aesthetic form was unique in its capacity to frame the didactic structures of educational order (blackboards, classroom spaces, diagrams, lectures) as poetic expressions of democratic unfolding, what he often referred to as the ‘permanent conference’.

Utilizing the pedagogical apparatus to communicate ideas around democracy and participation is at the heart of the second installation in the *Planting a Seed* project. Intervening in the school foyer, the artists have constructed a life size representation of the branch and the apple from Newton’s garden. Cast in bronze the installation hangs from the side wall, tempting the viewer to reach for the apple, which is just out of reach. There is a peculiar tension in the sculpture, a sense of immanence, of anticipation, that the moment between the known and the unknown has been suspended in time, frozen as a constant reminder to future generations that the risk of the ‘new’ often emerges at insignificant moments. However, although it is deceptively simple the sculpture is not what it seems on first viewing. Similar to the collective act of participation that motivated the orchard, the tree branch is a hybrid of different grafts from different trees in the local community. In this process local volunteers donated tree cuttings for the bronze sculpture from their own gardens, amalgamating the community and the school. Together it provides the illusion of unity, of natural form, yet this image is denaturalised by the reality of its process, its difference, not only as a hybrid of different tree grafts but also as a disjunctive combination of different art forms. This tension highlights the difference between traditional forms of art making, such as the artisanal, representational tradition of bronze casting, and the disruption of that tradition by conceptualisation. Historically, it is this conceptual disruption that eventually led contemporary artists to emphasise the relational dimension of the artistic process against the aesthetic dimension of the art object.

In this sense, the processes involved in the construction of the foyer artwork could be used to draw students towards one of the major shifts influencing contemporary art, which is the shift away from *making*, towards *thinking*. Due largely to the influence of French artist Marcel Duchamp, art production no longer depends on the singular craftsman, the techniques of production or the mimicry of forms, but rather the plurality of ideas behind the work, its interpretive complexity and its critical capacity.

All in all, the creative act is not performed by the artist alone; the spectator brings the work in contact with the external world by deciphering and interpreting its inner qualifications and thus adds his contribution to the creative act.¹¹

By subtracting the traditional values of craft from artistic production conceptual art drew attention to the values inherent in the framing elements surrounding the art object. In other words, it drew attention to the architectural nuances that make up the space in which art is displayed. This led to what is largely understood today as installation art or environmental art.

As with much environmental art the third installation in the *Planting a Seed* installation activates certain elements of architectural design in such a way as to enable that design to perform a different role than originally planned. An homage to Newton’s theory of optics, a series of small dispersive glass prisms have been installed high up along the rectangular window display in the corridor of the science wing of the school. Barely recognisable, the prisms function to project animated displays of abstract spectrums onto the adjacent wall which dance supernaturally on the back of the eye as the viewer passes by. In this sense the works ephemerality is subject to the elements which provide its context, the direction of light, their height from the ground, their distance from the adjacent walls, their capacity to translate those parts into the projection of a whole. Its an aesthetic which teaches us that the world is in flux, contingent on the environments that we live, and the changes inherent to them. If, as Emanuel Levinas has suggested, the act of creation is significantly determined by risk, then in order to understand the beauty of this intervention, we have to consider the aesthetic nature of its context (otherwise how would we know if it is an intervention). In this sense, the beauty of the prism installation (and the *Planting a Seed* exhibition as a whole), is defined by the aesthetic dimension of an educational/architectural standardisation.

For educator Tyson Lewis this dynamic can be understood through the concept of the ‘technological sublime’, which suggests that the apparatuses of standardisation represent the, ‘immensity of a system of measurement’ that is ‘mathematically sublime’ in that it is ‘large beyond all comparisons’.¹² This dynamic is explored in many aspects of the *Planting a Seed* installation, from the planting of the local orchard in the school grounds, to the organic planting workshops developed with the students, to their collaboration with the Irish Seed Savers NGO working against the ‘immensity’ of the global food market. Similar institutional apparatuses of measurement prescribe a conception of education that is ‘strong, predictable, and efficient’¹³. In this context artistic education can often appear weak, vulnerable, and contingent, however, it is precisely for this reason that we need to defend the ‘weak power’ of artistic education. Much like the ‘heritage seed’ cultivated by the Irish Seed Savers NGO Art education needs to be supported by institutional frameworks that acknowledge its inherent vulnerability at a time of increasing instrumentalistion and impatience. In a classroom situation such an ethos would affirm the ‘wonder’ of *learning for learning* sake and support the ‘beautiful risk’ of new knowledge to puncture a hole in the pedagogical frameworks which decide on what is worth learning and what is not worth learning. It is the same ethos that produced the ‘beautiful risk’ that discovered the laws of gravity... by looking at an apple falling from a tree.

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MARGARET LANE

When Margaret bought the apple trees many years ago in Athy, Co Kildare they were sold in pots and were very small in size. So small in size she thought they would never bear fruit but today the trees stand tall and produce a good crop of apples.



DD LANE & MAURA LANE

Situated on a hill that over looks the rolling Limerick and Kerry countryside, DD and Maura are keen gardeners and have children who attended school in Abbeyfeale. Their apple trees, planted in their back garden, are 15 years old and produce cooking apples.



TRIONA TOBIN

The apple tree in Triona's garden belongs to her daughter Ena Tobin. Ena received the tree as a present for her first holy communion from her aunt Mairead Daly in 1992. The tree produces very good apple crop so sometimes Triona gives them away to other people. She also produces apple jelly, apple and blackcurrant and apple and blackberry jelly from the apples.

Triona has a number of old CDs hanging from the apple tree. Her grandson Richard was fascinated to hear his grandmother hung them on the tree in order to keep the birds away. Intrigued by this he asked his grandmother what DVD was on the tree? Triona told him it was a Frank Sinatra CD, Richard's response was to ask, "Do the pigeons not like Frank Sinatra?"



ANGELA O ROURKE

Angela O' Rourke's apple tree is from the oldest apple orchard in Abbeyfeale town. A number of older people we met in Abbeyfeale recalled memories of stealing apples from the orchard at the back of the A.I.B bank. Enquiring with the young bank staff about the orchard, we were met with confusion, as there was no knowledge of any orchard. After some investigation it transpired that the land had changed hands some years ago and the orchard was walled off onto someone's else's property.

Angela O' Rourke, a local publican who now owns the land, brought us to see the orchard. A few of the large, old, lichen covered trees remain. Standing in the orchard you could feel a sense of history to which Angela attests to. Her husband has memories of taking apples from the trees over 60 years ago. Angela's memories of the orchard span 40 years to when she first got married and the trees belonged to the bank. She recalled the path on the perimeter of the orchard in which the bank manager's mother, an old woman dressed in black, paced every day. Angela would overhear the old woman, clutching her rosary beads, reciting decades of the rosary around the orchard. The path is still visible today.



DORA & MICK BRODERICK

Dora and Mick's son Michael is a student in Coláiste Íde agus Iosef. The donated branches were planted by Michael's granddad William in his back garden, which is set against a beautiful rural landscape by the river Feale.

William, who has sadly passed away, was good with plants and especially with trees. 15 years ago he grew the apple trees from seed and started off their life on the window sill of his house. Sometime later, they were then put in his potting shed and were planted outside when they became stronger. In the epic storms that hit Ireland in February 2014, the potting shed blew down and sections of the shed were found several fields away. Unfortunately due to construction work taking place the trees will have to be dug up. Williams's memory will live on through his apple tree branch now cast in bronze. Hanging on the school wall, his grandson Michael will pass by it every day on his way into school.



DARRAGH O' SULLIVAN

Darragh O' Sullivan is a transition year student in Coláiste Íde agus Iosef; the branch he donated for the sculpture came from his grandfather's tree. His grandfather bought the trees in a flower shop in Adare, Co Limerick. When he arrived home from town he immediately dug a hole in the soil and planted the trees, using a small amount of manure to make sure they would grow. He originally planted the trees in the front lawn but has since moved it to the side of his house. In recent years, the trees have produced dozens of apples.



KEVIN REIDY

Kevin Reidy is the father of Elliot who is a transition year student in Coláiste Íde agus Iosef. The variety of apple tree grown in his orchard is known as Katy (Malus Domestica) The tree was planted in 1989 by Elliot's grandfather and was sourced from a local nursery. The tree was one of six trees he planted in the orchard. They found it is a very easy tree to grow and is disease resistant. The fruit is a mix of speckled red and green apples, the tree fruits early and the apples store pretty good. The tree usually gives a good crop of apples and the blossoms make it a nice tree in the spring garden. However 2015 wasn't so good as there was frost while the tree was in bloom so the crop was poor and the lack of sun over the summer gave small apples. The apple that hangs from the sculpture was cast from this tree.



CHRISSIE MCCARTHY

Chrissie bought her apple trees from a nursery in Limerick; her husband planted them in their back garden. They produce cooking apples but the apples it produces are quite small so she doesn't use them for cooking.





Previous page: Bronze Apple Tree Sculpture detail, 2015
Left: Bronze Apple Tree Sculpture, dimensions variable, 2015
Above left: Bronze Apple Tree Sculpture detail, 2015
Above right: Bronze Apple Tree Sculpture in production at foundry, 2015



Grafting Workshop with Transition Year Art Group students, 2015

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Grafting Workshop with Transition Year Art Group students, 2015



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Seed Savers Field Trip with
Transition Year Art students, 2015



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Bronze Foundry Site Visit with Transition Year Art



Top: The LAB Gallery Visit with Transition Year Art

Right: UCD College of Science Spectrometer Workshop and Art in Science Residency Visit with Transition Year Art Group students, 2015







The Flower of Kent tree, Woolsthrope Manor, Lincolnshire U.K. 2015



Planting of the Isaac Newton Orchard at Coláiste Íde agus Iosef, Abbeyfeale by Transition Year Art Group students, 2015





images: Light installation, stainless steel and dispersive prisms, 900mmX600mm, 2015

BUÍOCHAS

This art project exists because of the contributions of so many people through out all stages of the development of the project who have given their time, energy, talents, knowledge, and generosity to the project.

The artists would like to thanks all of those involved in the making of this project, namely the Coláiste Íde agus Iosef Per Cent for Art School Committee, especially Jim Tierney, Jim Vaughan and Shane Curtain, the Abbeyfeale community, the Transition Year Art Group, the tree donators; Triona Tobin, D.D. Lane, Margaret Lane, Chrissie McCarthy, Kevin Reidy and Darragh O Sullivan, The National Trust; Custodian Jannette Warrener and Conservation Manager Margaret Winn of Woolsthrope Manor, Lincolnshire. Co-ordinator of the UCD College of Science Artists in Residence Programme Emer O’ Boyle, Dr, Fergal O’Reilly and Dr. Tom McCormack of the School of Physics, UCD. Seedsavers NGO, Scarriff, Áine Ní Fhlatharta and Cormac Griffith. Glenn Loughran, Joseph Carr, Elaine Heelan and the Sodexo staff, all the team in the Bronze Art Foundry and the Connolly and O’Donoghue clans.

The artists would like to give a very special thank you to Michael Cross who has put in an extraordinary amount of hard work, time and dedication over the last year into making this project happen.

The artists would like to give a special dedication to Jim Vaughan on the occasion of his retirement as art teacher from Colaiste Ide agus Iosef,his passion and dedication to art and his students was inspirational.

BIOS

Augustine O’Donoghue is a graduate of Limerick School of Art and Design and the National College of Art and Design Dublin. Her practice engages with concepts of local and global socio-political issues. She has worked with travellers, immigrant workers, women’s groups and social organizations in Ireland, Latin America and Africa. Exhibitions and projects have been developed in Ireland, Europe, USA, China, Canada, Brazil, Colombia and Africa and taken place in a wide variety of locations including museums, cattle marts, government buildings, supermarkets, factories and political events.

Carol Anne Connolly is a visual artist from the West of Ireland. Her work examines the development of current cultural, civic and social ideas relating to place. She employs a variety of mediums, strategies and techniques to produce work. Her approach to making work develops into interdisciplinary, socially engaged and collaborative projects. Past projects have involved working with diverse communities and individuals including ghost estate residents, environmental NGOs, farmer/protestors, historians, law academics and skratch musicians. Connolly graduated from the National College of Art and Design with an Honours Degree in Fine Art Sculpture (2006) and completed an MA in Arts Policy and Practice through the Huston School of Film and Digital Media at the National University of Ireland, Galway(2011).

Glenn Loughran is an artist and educator. He Lectures at the Dublin School of Creative Arts, Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) and The National College of Art and Design(NCAD).



TRANSITION YEAR
STUDENT GROUP

Megan Ahern
Michael Broderick
Kayleigh Brosnan
Aodhán Cotter
Yves David
Cillian Doody
Stephen English
Orla Greaney
Aoife Harnett
Aoife Lane
Ryan Maher
Niamh Mc Court
Rowanna Mc Nulty
Megan Meehan
Kierán Morrissey
Nikita Murphy
Patricia Murphy
Tamara Nolan
Shannon O'Grady
Stephen O'Regan
Darragh O'Sullivan
Elliott Reidy
Emma Sexton
Igor Teixeira

PER CENT FOR
ART COMMITTEE

Jim Tierney (Principal)
Jim Vaughan
Shane Curtin
Brian Kelleher
Della Reidy Fitzgerald
Michael Cross
Patricia Murphy
James Leahy
Jamie Harnett
Paul Tarpey

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Joseph Carr
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