

“Art should go everywhere all the time”

Clíodhna Shaffrey

“Art should go everywhere all the time” – an aspiration of artist Mierle Laderman Utkes, who modelled her on-going project with the New York Sanitation Department on the mapping processes used to find the waste. Just as sanitation goes everywhere all the time, for Utkes, art should go everywhere all the time. And so we come to find – just as Arthur Danto in his insightful text *After the End of Art*, states that “art can be anything and everything [in art] is possible.”¹ – that one of the more dominant trends within contemporary arts practice is the artists’ engagement with the ‘real world’. Spilling out, opening rifts, vaults, fissures. Operating in space, in place, in non-place, and in the interstices. Attaching themselves like warts to never-ending possibilities within the quotidian. So it is to be expected that public art programmes such as the *Per Cent for Art* scheme, has played a role in supporting such trends and in opening up a space for artists to work beyond modernist formalist strategies and institutional boundaries, and lodge their work within the layers of everyday life and possibility, engaging in myriad ways with different audiences and participants. In truth, however, this is complex territory. There are always visible and invisible boundaries beyond permitted transgression, and a set of expectations (legal, aesthetic, social). For the commissioning of art funded through public building programmes such as roads, housing, sewage, water and village renewal schemes, carries within the intent of power and the politics of the commissioning party (public authority); the artist’s ambitions, and, the expectations of a given situation (the context and place – the social, physical, historical). Needless to say, different interests may be contradictory.

The on-going climate of prosperity that has fed an era of cultural and economic regeneration in Ireland, witnesses the ‘production of space’ at full speed, transforming our cities and countryside into massive and sprawling (re)development sites, with subsequent re-organisation of people through gentrification, displacement and economic migration. Such building programmes have also released considerable funding into *Per Cent for Art* programmes, making them one of the more fiscally resourced areas of arts funding. The utilisation of monies for *Per Cent for Art* programmes places responsibilities on the various parties to trust in one another but, often, project schemes are targeted towards ends that channel artistic outcomes and in the words of Jeni Walwin an “eerie element of unspoken control over artistic experimentation and risk prevails”². It must be asked who benefits from an agenda that promotes the marketing of place, or deals in limited ways with complexities of social cohesion or collective identity? Navigating a way through has proved both a source of deep frustration and disillusionment for artists, but it has also been a source of debate and discourse that has led to artistic liberation. It can be hard work, but when the dialogue succeeds, it can radically challenge existing definitions of public art, and perceptions of what it should be. Freed from always having to be a tangible object and, from the fixed rigidity of physical site, public art is no longer constituted by its physical or spatial aspects, limited by its geographical location, or architectural setting, instead it can be in any artistic form, or become a process and network of social relations, a ‘discursive’ site as Miwon Kwon calls it, “one delineated by a field of knowledge, intellectual exchange or cultural debate”.³ For this to happen there must be a genuine commitment from within the public authority and a trust in artists and their ideas that is open to all kinds of possibilities – challenging the familiar and enabling the unexpected. In turn, artists’ relinquishing certain control gain from others’ perspectives, insights and knowledge.

Finding alternative processes for making art which opens doors into other fields of knowledge and expertise and enables an active engagement with place and people has been at the forefront of Sligo Local Authorities’ public art programmes. From the start a commitment to subtly balance an artist-centred approach with one that enables an active and deep engagement with place and people, was conceived as a testing ground that would reflect on the merits and drawbacks of the commissioning programme and involve interested parties in the wider critical domain – the pilot programme, for example concluded with an international colloquium on public art in ‘rural, coastal and small urban environments’. In 1997 Sligo Arts Office (now Sligo Arts Service) initiated a radical

The exhibition 10 Years of Public Art in Sligo 1997–2007 came from suggestions made by artists and local authority staff at consultation meetings on public art in March 2007.

approach to commissioning public art structured for input from a focused Working Group and the external expertise of *Artworking*. This approach developed by the Arts Officer (Mary McAuliffe) and adopted by the Sligo Local Authorities provided the foundation for the future development of the local authorities’ public art policy, one that ensures support for artists and publics and enables on-going critical reflection. A key feature of the approach was the initiation of a pilot programme *Placing Art (1997–2002)* which secured the appointment of a public art coordinator. Following the success of the pilot the Sligo Local Authorities were the first to mainstream the post of Public Art Officer (Mary McDonagh) to sustain and develop their public art policy and ongoing commissions. As such the unexpected has been both sought and achieved here, and new models for public art commissioning emerge which inspire those involved in this area of work.

Placing Art, the first of its programme and established as a pilot, takes its cue from ‘local history and tradition’ and included artists Ronnie Hughes, Imelda Peppard, Laura Gannon, Ron van der Noll, Martina Coyle, Hilary Gilligan and Pauline O’Connell. In differing ways these artists have sought out inflection – the layered peculiarities in place – engaging with memory, ritual and narrative, to produce some remarkably poignant work, many involving collaboration with specific communities.⁴ *Unravelling Developments, (2004–2006)* curated by Joe Lee, is conceived around the changing environment and its subsequent impacts on culture and the landscape. It includes artists Jack Harte, Carlo Kroon, Dara McGrath, Christine Mackey, Grace Weir and Ian Wilson. A second phase of commissions is to come on stream, which will include Alberto Duman, Stephen Hurrell, John Langan, Nevan Lahart and Helen O’Leary and Paul Chidester. These projects have and are producing intelligent enquiries into place which support an exploration and critique into the processes of place-making and an openness to multiple narratives, forgotten places and mystery. In addition to the projects commissioned under these two main programmes, *The Village Renewal Scheme* has further commissioned art works by Maud Cotter, Elizabeth Caffrey, Tony Stallard and Alex Pentek.

The exhibition *10 Years of Public Art in Sligo: 1997–2007* at Sligo Art Gallery is an opportunity to assemble and reflect on ten years of work achieved by the artists and their collaborators. It presents actual works – painting, photography, film, books – alongside documentary material – drawings, notebooks, slides, videos, CDs and texts in a ‘studio-style’ exhibition format that hopes to give some insights into the process of making, as well as providing a chance to experience again specific works. Christine Mackey, whose current work-in-progress, is based around a proposal for a footpath in Doorly Park, and involves the artist in an enquiry into the landscape and the space of the walker, will set up studio in the gallery for the duration of the exhibition.

The exhibition offers an opportunity to mark the ten-year birthday celebrations of Sligo Local Authorities’ Arts Service. To toast the hard work achieved by so many here over the years. And while it may be possible for art to be anything and everything, it may not be possible for art to go everywhere, all the time, and nor might we want this. That said, Sligo Arts Service has been genuinely committed to working closely with artists through its *Per Cent for Art* scheme and other artists’ programmes, to dismantle barriers and negotiate a way through, to all sorts of places and situations – the real, the imagined, and those that belong in memory. CS 08.07

1. Arthur C. Danto, *After the End of Art. Comtemporary Art and the Pale of History*, Princeton Press, 1997. Danto’s philosophy asserts that as the definition of art no longer entails stylistic imperative whatever, anything can be a work of art. We thus enter the post-historical period where with qualification anything goes.

2. Jeni Walwin, *Working Methods. Art in Public* as referenced by Cavin Murphy in his essay *Civil Matter in Placing Art – A Pilot Art Programme*, p. 19, 2000. Sligo County Council.

3. Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another: Specific Art and Locational Identity*, MIT, 2004.

4. For further reading on artists projects see essays in *Placing Art a Colloquium* and Cavin Murphy’s essays in *Placing Art – A Pilot Art Programme*, both published by Sligo County Council, 2000. Individual catalogues exist for some of the commissioned works such as Dara McGrath’s *Plantation*, with an essay by Joe Lee, Sligo County Council, 2006.

10 Years of Public Art in Sligo

Sligo Art Gallery, Hyde Bridge, Sligo

1997–2007

The Arts Department

Sligo County Council, Market Yard

Sligo, County Sligo, Ireland

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10 Years of Public Art in Sligo 1997-2007 The planning for *10 Years of Public Art in Sligo 1997-2007* began in April 2007. On behalf of the Members of Sligo County and Borough Council's, I wish to thank the artists whose work is featured in the exhibition and whose projects are profiled in this brochure, for their cooperation, enthusiasm and generosity. Special thanks also to the main local authority funding agency for the Per Cent for Art Scheme, The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government for their enlightened support of artists through the scheme. We are indebted to our local authority Directorates and Strategic Policy Committees: *Housing, Social, Cultural and Corporate Affairs, Infrastructural Services, Planning and Environmental Services, Community, Enterprise and the Arts, and Finance*; to County and Borough Council Officials in key departments and schemes charged with the delivery of capital projects in the City and County: *Forward Planning, Roads, Water Services, Parks and Open Spaces, Housing, Regeneration, Urban Renewal, Village Renewal, Procurement / Public Private Partnerships*. Their support and collaboration has played a pivotal role in the successful delivery of Sligo's public art programmes. I am deeply grateful to Clíodhna Shaffery for her insightful and comprehensive essay on public art in this brochure, and to Clíodhna and Ruari O'Cuiv for their excellent curation and coordination skills. Their combined expertise, experience and flexibility were central to the successful realisation of this exhibition. Many thanks also to Robbie McDonald and the staff of Sligo Art Gallery for their cooperation, assistance and generosity.

Since 1997 the evolving and distinctive character of the Sligo Local Authorities public art policy has been shaped and influenced by many individuals. Special thanks to the County Manager, Hubert Kearns for giving the programme early impetus and to the members of the Sligo Local Authorities Public Art Working Group for their openness and willingness to engage with the process. In particular, I want to thank Sean Martin, Senior Executive Architect, Sligo Borough Council for taking on the key role of Chairperson of the Public Art Strategy Group and for his ongoing advice and encouragement. To Jenny Haughton, Artworking for her expert advice and facilitation in establishing the six *Placing Art* commissions. To Professor Liam Kelly, University of Ulster for lending his expertise to shaping the critical and reflective elements of the pilot *Placing Art* programme. To Catherine Marshall, Head of Collections at IMMA, for her professional generosity and ongoing encouragement. To Gavin Murphy for the time he invested to capture so accurately and eloquently, in the written word the artists' stories behind each of the six *Placing Art* commissioned works. To David Smith, Atelier for the creation of an inventive and distinctive design style for our public art publications.

Special thanks to Sligo Leader Partnership and the Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation for their early belief and crucial investment, both financial and professional in the pilot *Placing Art* programme.

In 2004 the Sligo Local Authorities Public Art Plan Art Best Placed 2004-2006 was published and a new programme of per cent for art commissions commenced entitled *Unravelling Developments*; I would like to pay special tribute to its curator, Joe Lee. He has brought great insight, creativity and flair to this role. Special thanks also to the present Public Art Steering Group who through their diverse membership contribute in so many important ways to our ongoing public art commissioning programmes.

The staff of Sligo Arts Department deserve special acknowledgement for their work, interest and support; I thank Denise McCarthy, Sarah Leavy and Rhona McGrath.

I want to give a special mention to the Sligo Local Authorities Public Art Officer, Mary McDonagh for her exceptional work in developing Sligo's public art policy and programmes over the past eight years. She has and continues to bring great ability, expertise, and generosity to this important role.

This exhibition provides us with a good opportunity to celebrate the achievements and innovations of public art in Sligo. **Mary McAuliffe**, Arts Officer

10 Years of Public Art in Sligo 1997–2007 Commissioned Works

Directorate of Housing, Corporate & Emergency Services Housing

Laura Gannon Underswim
16mm Film, 1997—2000
North Ward, Borough
Underswim is the result of a year-long working process between Laura Gannon and Sligo Living History and Heritage Group. The film shot in the Old Jail in Sligo is a reminder of a near silent past, confinement and correction as it focuses on the awareness of the body in space. Performed by Carmel Seery. Soundtrack for the film is composed by Ronan Coleman.

Ronnie Hughes The Peoples' Purchase
Painting, 1997—2000
East Ward, City Hall
The Peoples' Purchase involved members of the Weighbridge community in a yearlong programme led by Catherine Marshall, Head of Collections, at IMMA, which explored issues around art and public collections. The group were then asked to select an artwork for purchase to hang in the refurbished City Hall. They selected two paintings by Ronnie Hughes *Ghost Workers*, 1991 and *Breath* 1995.

Grace Wei Up on the Greenfort
Film, 2004—2006
Greenfort, North Ward, Borough
"There is a certain mystery about the site, it has always been a bit inaccessible or seeming remote but I think there exists the idea that it is a place of importance without always knowing why. It has become a place where people's imaginations are loosened and different stories unfold across its grassy height." Grace Wei's film *Up on the Greenfort* captures beautifully not only the panoramic views from the vantage point of the Greenfort but people's personal recollections of a place for the imagination.

Elizabeth Caffrey Living Membrane
Site-specific sculpture in bronze, 2003—2004
Grange, North County Sligo
Located in a park along the riverbank at Bootree lane, Grange, to re-activate an old walkway in the village, *Living Membrane* is life-cast from elder tree twigs found on Bootree lane, the name of the site, and a common name for the elder tree. The sculpture's form – bronze column of elder tree twigs – is based on living systems in ecology and the environment (springs, streams, rivers, estuary to pathways, laneways, roadways and motorways), reflecting the mirroring of biological structures in our environment. The possibility for the artist to continue working this site which will involve the planting of seven trees continues an ongoing relationship between artist, site and community.

Ronnie Hughes Keepsakes
Performative commemoration; transparent resin spheres cast from a stone cannonball and containing mementoes placed inside – objects, poems, photographs – released into the sea at Streedagh Beach at evening tide, 1997—2000
Streedagh, North County Sligo
Keepsakes involved a collaboration between the artist and 320 members of a local community that poignantly marked the loss of over 1000 Spanish sailors on Streedagh beach when attacked in 1588 by local inhabitants and the Royal forces, while struggling to get ashore after their fleet was driven into rocks by violent storms. The work consisted of over three hundred and twenty spheres cast – in transparent resin – from a stone cannonball washed up on Streedagh beach from one of the Armada shipwrecks. Into each of these spheres the artist placed mementoes given to him by the local community. In an evening performance, at full tide, the spheres were released back into the sea as an act of remembrance.

Imelda Peppard Owning the Space
Performance, 1997—2000
Cranmore, East Ward, Borough
Owning the Space is a performance work by Imelda Peppard in collaboration with the women's group from Cranmore estate. It involved research and the collection of stories and interviews over a long period of time, which trace issues around the impact of relocation and displacement and the resourcefulness of a community to improve their living conditions. The performance included a sculptural element; a giant silk canopy overlaid with a soundtrack built up from interviews with the women, recorded sounds from the area and a musical score by Jho Harris, Aileen Donagher and Ivan Gibson.

Ron Van der Noll A Metaphoric Portrait of Michael Coleman
Installation using sound and kinetic objects, 1997—2000
Gurteen, South County Sligo
Ron Van der Noll's installation uses sound, physical movement and visual dynamics as a means to celebrate the legacy of traditional musician Michael Coleman.

Jack Harte In the Wake of the Bagger
Literature; a novel and CD of stories and songs, 2006
Dromore West, West County Sligo
Jack Harte's work of fiction *In the Wake of the Bagger* is a novel based on intimate memories of his childhood and his family who moved from Killeudduff near Easky as economic migrants. The novel is an authentic reconstruction of life in the fifties and a meditation on time and change.

Jack Harte Lament for the Birds
Literature; a novel and CD of stories and songs, 2006
Dromore West, West County Sligo
Jack Harte's *Lament for the Birds* is a compilation CD of songs and stories, based on writings from his short stories *Under Gogol's Nose*. Integrated into the lyrics of traditional sean nós tunes and sung by Carmel Gunning, with the author also reading from some of his stories.

Dara McGrath Plantation
Photography, 2004—2006
Enniscrone, West County Sligo
Dara McGrath's photographs explore the physicality of the planning process and how it impacts on the landscape. Surveying the location around Enniscrone in a meticulous way, McGrath identified and indexed over two-hundred sites of which ten images were selected and produced as photographs, in newspaper advertisements, billboards and in a publication.

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Carlo Kroon Sundial
Sculpture proposal, 2007—2008
Carlo Kroon's project *Sundial* is a public sculpture proposal. The original site is unsuitable. The proposal may be adapted for a new location.

Christine Mackey Riverworks
Research based project investigating into landscape and space of the walker, 2007—2008
Garavogue, East Ward, Borough
Christine Mackey is working on a proposal based around the existing footpath in Doorly Park. "To walk is to give ourselves time and space." So the main question for Mackey is how to utilise this 'function' in the development of a proposed artwork, which does not impede on the landscape or the space of the walkers. A close collaboration involves the Parks section of the Borough Council and local residents.

John Langan Fóidín Meara
Researched collaborative-based project, 2007—2008
Earlsfield (a field in transformation) Ballymote, East County Sligo
"Fóidín Meara": A place where directions are false – where the fairies put a spell on a piece of earth, and whoever inadvertently steps upon it loses his way." *Fóidín Meara* is an experimental, time based collaborative project, which involves the creation of a series of interventions in a random field in County Sligo. In the past all fields were named, nowadays many of the names have been forgotten or changed. With this in mind *Fóidín Meara* is an arts based project that provides both metaphor and microcosm for a conceptual engagement with people and place which examines the transformation and diversity of rural areas and questions notions of local versus global. The work will require collaboration between rural development organizations, an archaeologist, artist, botanist, farmer and website designer and others.

Directorate of Community Enterprise & the Arts Community & Enterprise Department Village Renewal Schemes

Tony Stallard Flame
Site-specific sculpture 2006—2007
Ballisdare, East County Sligo
Flame is a site-specific sculpture for the town of Ballisdare and a contemporary memorial to WB Yeats. Using luxon light the sculpture responds to the passer-by by changing between colours to suggest a flickering flame.

Alex Pentek Leaf Seats
Site-specific sculpture, 2007
Collooney, East County Sligo
Leaf Seats is a site-specific sculpture for the town of Collooney which consists of a series of giant cast bronze leaves.

Maud Cotter Pulse
Site-specific installation, 2003
One Stop Shop, Tubbercurry South County Sligo
Pulse is a site-specific sculptural installation that extends the length of the foyer space of the One Stop Shop at Tubbercurry. Made from perforated cardboard, threaded through a steel wire and with layers of resin, it forms a single line of tension high up and across the 14 metre foyer space – like a simple line drawing, undulating only very slightly – as "an intestinal element in a cluster".

Directorate of Infrastructural Services Roads

Martina Coyle, Hilary Gilligan and Pauline O'Connell Regeneration
Site-specific interventions 1997—2000
Knoxspark, East County Sligo
Martina Coyle, Hilary Gilligan and Pauline O'Connell collaborated together to produce a series of interventions in Knoxpark. A walkway was created incorporating a 'pillow-stone' inspired by the discoveries on this significant archaeological site. Stone benches are placed to invite the visitor to relax and enjoy the views. Carved orientation stones carry information about the ecology and history of the site. Indigenous plants have been re-introduced to the area ensuring that the landscape will continue to develop and change over time.

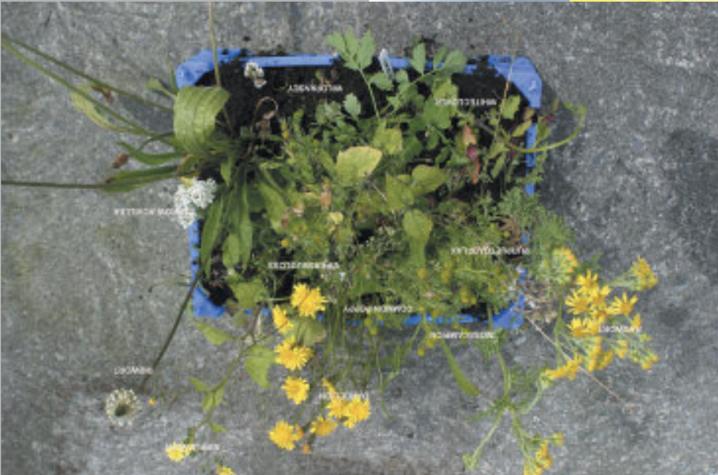
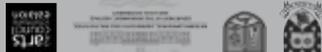
Elizabeth Caffrey Living Vestiges (working title)
2003—2007
Inner Relief Road, City Centre
Living Vestiges a response to the disappearance of vernacular architecture and our threatened environment. Elizabeth Caffrey's intimate pieces are cast in bronze from silicon moulds of 100 native plants and weeds (medical and everyday). 420 items will be located in clusters at three sites close to the Relief Road, where such plants and weeds continue to grow in spite of intensive development.

Directorate of Infrastructural Services Water Services Department

Donald Urquhart Plane: Lines, Larus: Cygnus
2004
Garavogue River
A series of 55 stainless steel polished lines project vertically out of the water at Garavogue River (city centre) in a formalist work that is conceived in direct response to the location, and provokes an interaction with the natural world around and, in particular with the black-headed gulls (larus) and mute swans (cygnus) present at the site. The diameter of the rods providing enough space for the gulls to perch; "*Larus: Cygnus* creates a subtle unification of places, that of the birds and the human spectator", Gavin Morrison.

Ian Wilson Pieces of Elsewhere
Music, 2005
Sligo City (various locations)
Pieces of Elsewhere is written for soprano Natalie Raybould and the RIAM Percussion Ensemble, with texts translated from Japanese by Sam Hamill. The composer's idea was to write music that would be contemplative and atmospheric in mood, allowing the listener to step outside their familiar surroundings for a brief moment and imagine beyond the urban environment. *Pieces of Elsewhere* was made available to a public audience though specially designed 'listening posts' created by students of Industrial Design at Sligo IT. The work was installed at Iarnród Éireann Station; the Quayside shopping centre and the IT Sligo during the summer of 2005.

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Front cover: Keepsakes by Ronnie Hughes (main image), *Regeneration* by Martina Coyle, Hilary Gilligan and Pauline O'Connell. This page (clockwise from top): *Underswim* by Laura Gannon, *Greenfort* by Grace Wei, *Riverworks* by Christine Mackey, *Sundial* by Carlo Kroon (photograph by Joe Lee), *Lament for the Birds* by Jack Harte (design/artwork by Pat Pidgion).

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Front cover: *Keepsakes* by Ronnie Hughes (main image),
Plantation – Site 53 by Dara McGrath. **Back cover:**
Regeneration by Martina Coyle, Hilary Gilligan and
 Pauline O’Connell. **This page (clockwise from top):**
Underswim by Laura Gannon, *Greenfort* by Grace Weir,
Riverworks by Christine Mackey, *Sundial* by Carlo
 Kroon (photograph by Joe Lee), *Lament for The Birds* by
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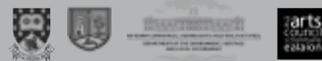


North Ward
 City Hall
 Greenfort
 Grange
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