PLACING ART

A PILOT PUBLIC ART PROGRAMME

Martina Coyle | Laura Gannon | Hilary Gilligan | Ronnie Hughes | Pauline O'Connel | Imelda Peppard | Ron van der Noll

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Foreword

In 1986 my Department introduced the Per Cent for Art Scheme, or the Artistic Embellishment Scheme as it was called then, for capital projects funded by it. As Minister for the Environment and Local Government, I am delighted to endorse **Placing Art**, a documentary account of a pilot public art programme that has pushed the boundaries of local authority public art initiatives in Ireland to date.

I congratulate Sligo County Council and Sligo Corporation on jointly initiating this programme which has responded to the opportunities afforded by the Per Cent for Art Scheme in both a practical and strategic way. It has also addressed issues raised in the recommendations of the Public Art Research Project Steering Group Report published in 1997.

I hope that **Placing Art**, through this publication, will provide inspiration for all who aspire to enhance and diversify the quality of public art.
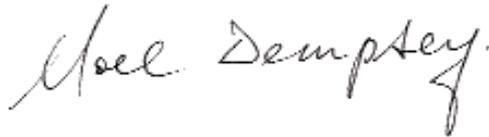
Noel Dempsey.

Noel Dempsey, T.D.,
Minister for the Environment and Local Government.

Introduction

Sligo County Manager

In the following pages the reader is invited to journey an intriguing variety of places and sites; a sacred place of archaelogical significance; a beautiful and remote beach with a tragic history; a cottage housing the memory of a great musician; an old jail resonant with the repentent and unrepentent; a housing estate where residents have re-interpreted the meaning of 'ownership' and finally to City Hall to find the people's contribution to the restoration of that fine building.

These six places have provided the sites for the **Placing Art** pilot public art programme. This joint initiative by Sligo County Council and Sligo Corporation aims to promote quality in the built and rural environment through a public art programme which is intended to assist and inform the adoption of a public art policy by Sligo Local Authorities.

A pilot approach was adopted to develop practical structures that will facilitate the ongoing commissioning of artists through the Per Cent for Art scheme which can now be applied to all central government construction projects. In the current climate of regeneration, the opportunities for commissioning public art are considerable. It is imperative that local authorities adopt a policy driven and strategic approach to public art commissioning.

In Sligo the pilot commissions sought to expand the range of art practices beyond what is usually found in public art commissions. The pilot projects aimed to be more reflective of current visual arts practice and so included time-based and installation work; new media and performance work.

A central aim of the pilot programme was that the artists would contribute to the awareness and understanding by the local community of their public artwork. This was achieved through a process of engagement with various community groups throughout Sligo town and county.

The programme's success was only made possible by a huge co-operative effort on the part of artists, local people in the form of voluntary groups, Sligo Leader Partnership and local authority officials. I wish to thank all who assisted and contributed to the programme.

In particular, I would like to thank Sligo Leader Partnership for their development expertise, Jenny Haughton, Artworking for her input into the design of the six pilot projects. Dr. Liam Kelly for acting as advisor and programme consultant to the Placing Art Colloquium in Sligo in December 2000, Dr. Gavin Murphy, author of this catalogue, for his careful and insightful approach to all concerned with the programme. Catharine Marshall of the Irish Museum of Modern Art for her advice and support to the People's Purchase project. Lastly my thanks to Mary Mc Auliffe, Arts Officer, for initiating and facilitating this pilot initiative and to the Public Art Co-ordinator, Mary McDonagh for her professional and personal commitment to making the programme a success.
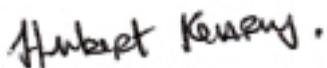
Hubert Kearns.

Hubert Kearns
Sligo County Manager

CIVIC MATTER: THE PLACING ART PUBLIC ART PROGRAMME

civic matter:

The **Placing Art** Public Art Programme

Gavin Murphy

Francis Wheatley
A View of College Green with a Meeting of the Volunteers on 4 November 1779 to Commemorate the Birthday of King William, (1779-80).
Courtesy of the National Gallery of Ireland

Ronnie Hughes
Ghostworkers, one of two paintings chosen for the People's Purchase for City Hall.

The term *placing art* is ripe with allusion. One senses a number of challenges set into the very title of Sligo's public art programme. These concern not only artists, organizers and participants involved directly in making art happen. They also concern the act of framing the venture through the written word. There is a conceptual dimension suggested by the term. *Placing art* points to a questioning and positioning of art within the theoretical contours of current modern art debate. There is also a physical dimension to the term – the task of *placing art* in geographical space. This suggests positioning art as a means to excite local traditions with their complex strands of cultural and historical forces woven through social space. It suggests a certain confidence in sensing art's place.

It would appear then, that from the very outset the title demands sensitivity and renewed awareness on the part of all involved in negotiating art's place in local circumstance. It demands a process of searching, questioning and discovery in the hope of finally knowing. Already, we have a touchstone against which the project as a whole can be measured: one grounded in a sense of place and grounded in the idea that a life questioned is a life worth living.

The origins of the **Placing Art** Programme can be traced to the establishment of the Arts Office by the local authorities in Sligo in 1997 (*for a full timetable of events, see Appendix*). The aim was to develop further a public arts policy for Sligo using available revenue from the Per Cent for Art scheme. The principle of this scheme is for one per cent of the total budget of a governmental building project to be used for commissioning artworks. The role of the Arts Office would be that of a facilitator for the scheme. This involved establishing the Public Art Working Group. This drew together architects, planners, housing officers and engineers who, together, were to identify housing and infrastructural projects that could avail of the per cent for art scheme. The wider role of the Arts Office was to push to make art a normal part of the region's planning process.

The aims of the Public Art Working Group crystallised in the light of debate from the 1997 governmental report by the Public Art Research Team (PART).

The report sought to promote art in the public sector by revising existing commissioning schemes and developing a strategy that would encourage public art commissions in a variety of sectors.[1] Public authorities were therefore encouraged to play a more rigorous role in developing a dynamic public art practice.

In tune with this ethos, the Public Art Working Group, with assistance from Artworking, established a programme with its own sense of dynamism. Introducing a Public Art Co-ordinator was central to this. The role of the co-ordinator was to further strengthen bonds between artists and the selected groups with whom they would be working. On one level, this would be achieved through practical day to day co-ordination of activities and tasks of all involved. On another, it entailed close engagement with the community around matters of artistic practice. Raising awareness and appreciation of the working procedures of contemporary artists was crucial in defining an artist-centred public art practice. Moreover, such a vision was fostered without sacrificing community engagement. The key to achieving this delicate balance lay in subtle negotiation between potentially conflicting needs of artist and community. Close working relations with many involved established a foundation of trust. In this way, it was possible to generate conditions in which quality art may be produced.

From the outset, artists were encouraged to create work that could challenge existing definitions of public art practice. This called for an astute awareness of the limits of existing models of practice on the part of the artist and those commissioning work. The selection of artists for each project was the responsibility of an independent panel of selector(s). Selecting was, once again, a matter of balancing carefully knowledge of community needs and concerns with a familiarity with the values and working process of artists interested in particular projects. Each project would, of course, have its own demands and limitations. Taking these into account was also a vital part of selecting suitable alliances.

Six areas were selected for pilot projects. Three projects were based in the county area. These were the Amenity Walk in Knoxspark, Streedagh Beach and

[1] The PART Steering Group summarized their objectives as follows:
   …to improve the artistic quality of public art, diversify the range of initiatives, provide a creative and professional working environment for artists, create alliances between organisations (including Local Authorities) and provide the public with better access and information on the works of art.
   See, *Public Art Research Project Steering Group Report to Government*, Dublin: Government Publications, 1992, p. 6.
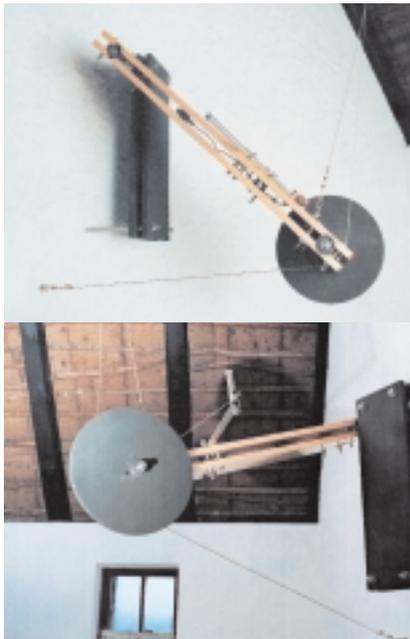
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Ron van der Noll
Detail from a **Metaphoric
Portrait of Michael Coleman.**

the Coleman Heritage Centre in Gurteen. The three projects based in the city were Holborn Hill, People's Purchase in the City Hall and the cultural event based on three local authority housing areas in Sligo (*See Appendix for further details*).

The idea behind developing pilot projects was twofold. First, it encouraged artistic experimentation through a wide range of artistic media. Second, it encourages reflection on the merits and potential drawbacks of each. Experimentation is only as good as its evaluation. Subsequently, attention is given to maintaining heat around each project through documentation and ongoing dialogue between those involved and various interested parties in the wider critical domain. The hope is that a policy for future public art projects may be drafted in the light of this experience. The grander ideal, though, is to use this experience to expand the role of art in everyday life. Certainly, the emphasis on experimentation and evaluation helps shift the perception of public art as the static blob on the roundabout to one taking a central role in contemporary visual art discourse. If this is one step on the way, then the strategy of Sligo's Public Art Programme to protect the central role and vision of the artist while remaining sensitive to community need is crucial to how this may be achieved.

These features, demands and values have been shaped by an awareness of, and engagement with, shifts and trends in contemporary public art practice at both national and international levels. In the attempt to frame the achievements of **Placing Art**, it is necessary to challenge a prevailing outlook that may characterise the 'arrival' of contemporary art practice as an imposition on local culture. The characterisation of the west of Ireland as a mythic domain lying beyond modernity in national and international imaginations has been well charted and challenged in recent years. However, a persistent residue of this debate has been a maintaining of a boundary between centre and periphery in the very act of identifying and framing the problem. It thus becomes necessary to remain profoundly suspicious of the contours of exiting debate around public art in the wider cultural sphere as a means to capture the potential significance of **Placing Art** in Sligo. Indeed, it is the very act of working through the limits of existing debate that its value may be found.

New models of public art practice are commonly seen to have arisen from a rejection of modernist art practice. This, it will be argued, presents one of the major fault lines in existing thought around 'new' public art. These models have arisen from the push to establish a firm institutional base for, and develop further, alternative forms of art practice defined in opposition to modernism. These include activist art. This is characterised by engagement with social and political issues outside the gallery space. They also include community art. This is characterised by a concern to draw out the best in local communities. Suzi Gablik reflects this shift in identifying:

> A new, evolving relationship between personal creativity and social responsibility, as old modernist patterns of alienation and confrontation give way to new ones of mutualism and the development of an active and practical dialogue.[2]

Grant Kester also calls for a public art practice that finds its value in the process of making and engagement with participants. Kester considers such practice as follows:

> … as a process as well as a physical product, and specifically as a process rooted in a discursively-mediated encounter in which the subject positions of artist and viewer or artist and subject are openly thematized and can potentially be challenged and transformed.[3]

The artist's collaboration with his or her public through ongoing dialogue is seen to be the basis of Kester's discursive aesthetic. Interestingly, Kester, in his demand for a 'new critical framework and a new aesthetic paradigm', also sets it in opposition to a modernist tradition. Kester characterises this in terms of its overt, cold formalism, its attachment to the legacy of a transcendental aesthetic and thereby its detachment from the heat of popular engagement.

Controversy around Richard Serra's **Tilted Arc** (1981) was a typical point from which such calls gathered strength and momentum. A large strip of metal stretching across an open plaza in Manhattan, the work blocked vision and disrupted the flow of the public walking across the square. It became, in effect, a barrier in open space.

[2] Suzi Gablik, *The Reenchantment of Art*, Thames and Hudson, 1991, p. 6.
[3] Grant Kester, 'Dialogical Aesthetics: A Critical Framework for Littoral Art', Varient Supplement, *Varient*, vol.2, no.9, Winter 2000, p. 3.

In the light of this, one critic viewed public art as the property of an elite who had no recourse to any kind of democratic process. For another, projects taking place outside the gallery environs would have to place value on the conditions in which public meaning is made.[4] These comments and the fact that public pressure forced the removal of the work attest to the significant shift in the relationship between artist and audience around public art. Elitist impositions on sites were no longer acceptable. Instead, public art was now to evolve from a participatory process in which communities collaborate actively with artists to create public works.

This new emphasis on public participation in the planning and making of public art is matched by a keen awareness of questions of power between artists and those they work with. Public art, according to Patricia Phillips, is based not on where it is but on what it does.[5] Its role, in this approach, lies in encouraging active participation on the part of those encountering it. This could involve a public engaging with and reflecting upon their experience as viewers. This could also involve a public or community contributing to, or even formulating, the body of ideas the art will work with. This latter point is, however, not without difficulties. In one way, an artist relinquishing full control over the working process can allow for a collaborative partnership. There is a delicate balance to be achieved here. A scenario to be wary of is where the artist sacrifices creative autonomy so as to gain 'authority' to speak for the community.[6] In another way, community participation in the making of art as a matter of making art *public* raises the question as to the degree of pressure on the artist in making art relevant to those public or private bodies funding the venture. This is a point raised by Jeni Walwin. She finds an 'eerie element of unspoken control over artistic experiment and risk' in the demand for public relevance.[7] It is significant in this respect to find Sligo's Public Art Programme placing a high degree of emphasis on protecting an artist-centred public art practice.

This sensitivity to questions of power is underscored by a concern with the relationship between public art and cultural and economic regeneration.

[4] See the comments of Jonathan Harris and David Baggaley in, ed. Susan Jones, *Art in Public: What, Why and How*, Sunderland: AN Publications, 1992, p. 8.
[5] Patricia C. Phillips, 'Peggy Diggs: Private Acts and Public Art', ed. Nina Felshin, *But is it Art? The Spirit of Art as Activism*, Seattle: Bay Press, 1995, p. 286.

Martha Rosler, for example, questions motivations behind many high profile public art projects that aim to improve the quality or beauty of an area. She asks who benefits from such projects, citing Battery Park City in New York as a test case. Built as a private enclave, the local authority managed its public art project. Art helped in marketing the area as a prestigious cultural oasis. Ultimately, this was to the benefit of the corporate investors backing its construction and the wealthy elite who would inhabit it.[8] Likewise, Sara Selwood maintains a sharp awareness around public art projects in a British context, recognizing that public art reflects the interests of its funding bodies. Wariness is in part attributable to tension as to whether public art, in the end, is of real benefit to the community it is to serve.[9]

Current debate then, is distinguished by attempts to renegotiate the relationship between artist, public and power in the face of modernism's 'stale' legacy. The desire to up the heat of popular engagement with art as a means of active citizenship is characterised in terms of the new, the fresh and the innovative. To question this assertion by drawing upon historical insight will allow a certain amnesia to be revealed in this claim. Ultimately, this will lead to uncovering a more solid foundation in which to bed the achievements of **Placing Art**.

The writing of art critic and historian, Thomas Crow, is a useful starting point in this regard. He identifies the Salon exhibitions organised by the Academy of Painting and Sculpture in eighteenth century France as one significant point in history where the public emerges as a significant force to influence questions of value in art practice. Previous to this, elite groups of individuals placed advantageously within the major art institutions determined the matter of art's quality. Crow characterises the shift as follows:

> Painters found themselves being exhorted in the press and in art-critical tracts to address the needs and desires of the exhibition "public"; the journalists and critics who voiced this demand claimed to speak with the backing of this public; state officials responsible for the arts hastened to assert that their decisions had been taken in the public's interest … [10]

[6] See, Grant Kester, 'Aesthetic Evangelists: Conversion and Empowerment in Contemporary Community Art', *Afterimage*, January 1995, p. 6.

[7] Jeni Walwin, 'Working Methods', *Art in Public*, op.cit., p. 111.

[8] Martha Rosler, 'Fragments of a Metropolitan Viewpoint', ed. Brian Wallis, *If You Lived Here: The City in Art, Theory and Social Activism*, Seattle: Bay Press, 1991, pp. 31-32.
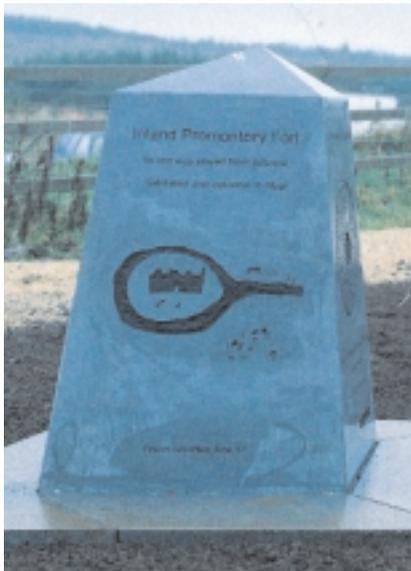
The public, in this context, could be looked upon as a relative term to be used (or abused) by those wishing to speak on its behalf. Of course, this shift met with significant opposition. However, it is Crow's point that the success of painter, Jacques-Louis David, lay in the drive away from private, sensual works towards an art addressing the public sphere.

Interestingly, recent work by T. J. Clark argues that the founding point of modernism lay in the hasty completion and prompt public display of David's **Death of Marat** (1793). This artwork acted as a focal point for a major procession through Paris. It was organised by the Jacobins as a means to gel the popular movement they had helped bring into being. Marat, tricked by a pleading letter from Charlotte Corday to allow her entry to his home, was stabbed in his bath. He immediately became a martyr for the Revolution. To make a painting of this scenario as a public spectacle was an intensely political act, not least as it marked the attempt to make Marat the property of Jacobins against various factions struggling to make Marat their own. Clark describes the tension as follows:

> The cult of Marat exists at the intersection between short-term political
> contingency and long-term disenchantment of the world. Maybe in its latter
> guise it often looks like a rear-guard action against the loss of the sacred.[11]

In this way, modernism, for Clark, has at its core a dynamic formed by tensions between the public, political contingency and the role art can play as a radical civic force binding people together.

We need not look to France to find similar tensions at play. Closer to home, recent analysis of Francis Wheatley's painting **A View of College Green with a Meeting of the Volunteers on 4 November 1779 to Commemorate the Birthday of King William** (1780) has revealed that public art in Ireland could also play an important role in the civic life of at least a significant section of its population.[12] On one level, the painting itself depicts a show of strength by the Volunteers in an effort to have existing Trade Laws repealed. For Fintan Cullen, this gathering reflected a growing Protestant nationalism, perceived by many as a threat to

[9] Sara Selwood, *The Benefits of Public Art: The Polemics of Permanent Art in Public Places*, London: PSI
Publishing, 1995, pp. 242-244.
[10] Thomas E. Crow, *Painters and Public Life in Eighteenth-Century Paris*, New Haven and London: Yale University
Press, 1985, pp. 1-2.

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Laura Gannon
Detail from **Underswim.**

the existing executive in Dublin. After its initial showing at the Society of Artists' exhibition in Dublin, 1780, numerous prints were circulated to ensure the work would play a more prominent role in public life. On another level, Grinling Gibbons's statue of King William, depicted in Wheatley's work, had already been established as a significant rallying point for public demonstrations. Erected by the Dublin Corporation in 1701, orange flags and banners were commonly draped over the work by those demonstrating loyalty to the crown. By 1779, the statue was being surrounded by declarations of a different kind by those also pledging allegiance to Williamite tradition. 'Free Trade or Speedy Revolution' was one such proclamation.[13]

The point to be made with this is to remind us that the visual arts have had a complex recent history of engagement in civic life. For some, this is the touchstone of modernism, whether it is in the form of a David painting, Tatlin's **Monument to the Third International**, or a Heartfield photomontage. This is an outlook denied by contemporary accounts of public art practice, particularly those concerned with producing a static image of disengagement in order to satisfy calls for a new or innovative practice.

The victim of this, of course, is history itself. It is necessary to be sceptical of current public art debate for this reason. The hyperbole in many accounts masks historical complexity. The fact that the common bond linking the six projects in **Placing Art** is their engagement with local history and tradition makes this point all the more compelling.

Keepsakes, by Ronnie Hughes, has drawn the treasured memories of participants through the Armada experience at Streedagh as a means to commemorate one of the darker episodes of local history. That each of the resin spheres may return to the beach over time is a lasting and enigmatic testament to historical memory.

Metaphoric Portrait of Michael Coleman, by Ron van der Noll, rekindles an awareness of complex tensions between innovation and tradition by alluding to the role of new technologies in securing Coleman's lasting legacy. The playful manner

[11] T.J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999, p. 31.
[12] See, Fintan Cullen, *Visual Politics: The Representation of Ireland, 1750 – 1930*, Cork: Cork University Press, 1997, pp. 50–66.
[13] Ibid., p. 66.

through which this is achieved is a useful reminder of the role of art can play in sparking deeper insight.

Owning the Space, by Imelda Peppard, generated a performative outlet to visualise experiences of a community growing and developing in the face of local authority housing policy in the 1970's. To witness the event is to appreciate the rich tangle of tales that underpin a sense of place.

The selection of two paintings by Ronnie Hughes for **The People's Purchase** reveals the value placed on local memory. The gravity of the choice facing the group focused attention on **Ghost Workers** and **Breathe**, two works questioning social space and the historical currents underlying them.

Underswim, by Laura Gannon, has captured on film the rhythmic shifts of a body in a dreamscape. Knowing the piece is set in the confines of the Old Jail in Sligo chills this slowed passage of time.

Regeneration, by Martina Coyle, Hilary Gilligan and Pauline O'Connell, encourages historical awareness through low-key intervention in the Knoxspark townland. Reworking the Situationist idea of dérive, the stroll through the site is subtly guided so that everyday concerns raised through a walk are meshed with a grander archaeological and ecological awareness of the grounds on which each treads.

Viewing each of the six projects gives a sense of the complex diffusion of history, memory and tradition in contemporary experience. This mix is less the dead weight on the artist's brush than the very material the dab hand can work. It is a considerable achievement that each of the projects, in their own way, can remind us of the important role the historical imagination plays in making sense of ourselves. Doing so with keen eyes on the local context makes this all the more important. To frame the achievements of **Placing Art** is at once to re-align vision so as to attain sensitivity to such matters.

To adopt this stance, however, is not to overlook many valuable insights that can be gleaned from existing public art debate. Gablik's demand for an active and practical dialogue around making art public, Kester's discursive aesthetic as a

learning experience for all involved, and, an awareness of the relationship between artist, public and power provide stable anchoring points in which to ground debate. But just as it has been necessary for those involved in structuring **Placing Art** to negotiate current thinking in the effort to preserve artistic autonomy in making public art, so too has it been necessary to negotiate present debate in asserting the value of **Placing Art**.

In the end, value is a matter of the depth to which each project seeps into the fabric of the lives of those encountering them and the subsequent action that impels. In this sense, value is a civic matter. This is not so far removed from Clark's notion of the role of art as a radical civic force binding people together as a marker for a valuable modern art practice. However, there is the question of the nature of the bond **Placing Art** can encourage. If, as it is argued, **Placing Art** can stand as an administrative model generating the conditions in which a quality art practice can thrive, then we have a sense of what that bond may be. Power is re-distributed from local authorities through art and back into the community from which it stems. If each project can illuminate historical complexity, instigate a re-questioning of established thought, and encourage a re-negotiation of one's sense of place in the locale, then we have a further sense of what that bond may be. It is one founded on empowerment through deeper insight. Renewed awareness and subsequent debate is the cornerstone of civic life. Public art has no small part to play in this grand process. In this way, **Placing Art** stands as an enlightened beacon in the fog of contemporary life. GM

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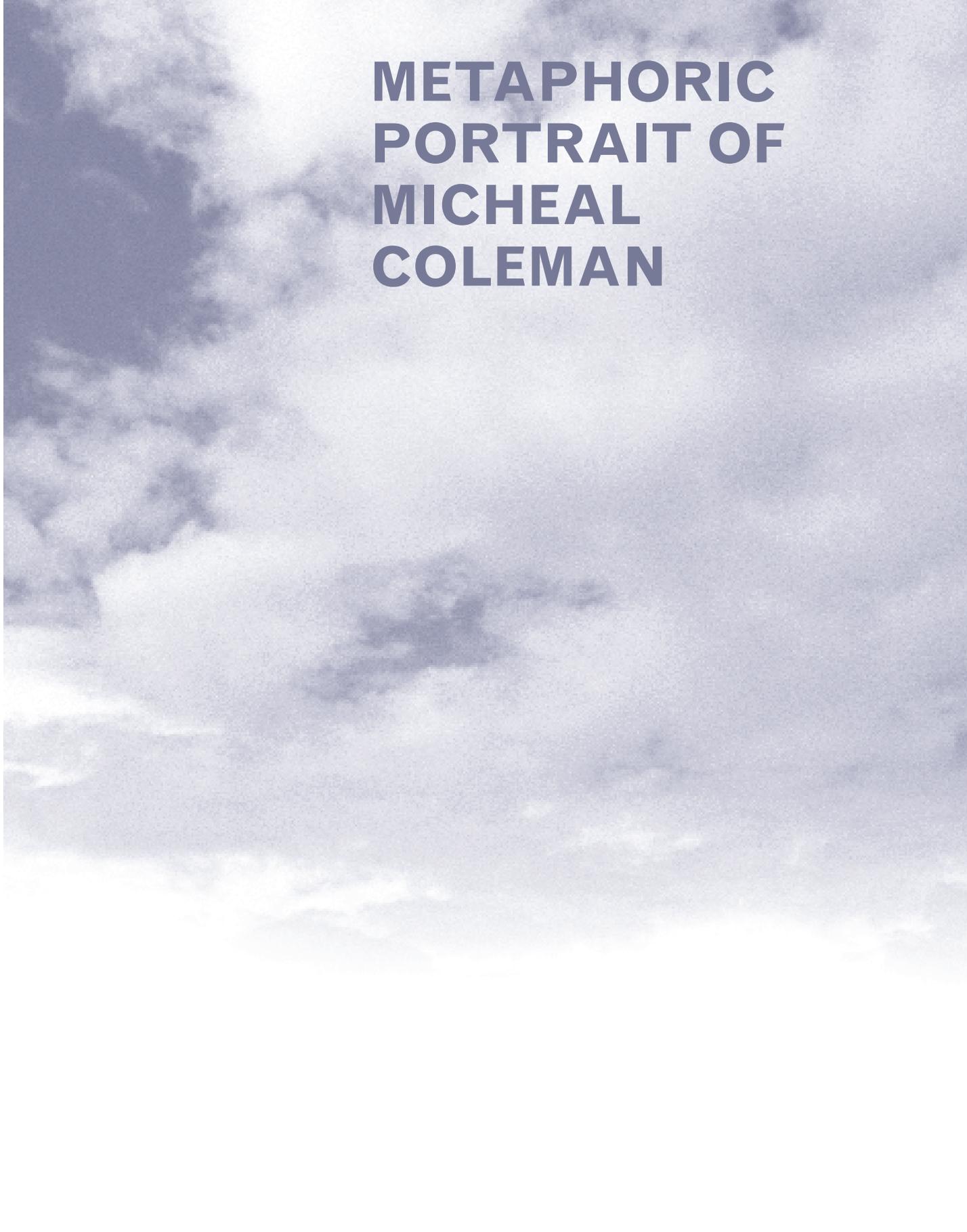
METAPHORIC PORTRAIT OF MICHEAL COLEMAN

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Coleman Heritage Centre,
Gurteen, Sligo.
The cottage is a replica of the
musician Michael Coleman's
home at Mount Irwin and is the
site for Ron van der Noll's
project.

Metaphoric Portrait of Micheal Coleman

Ron van der Noll

Ron van der Noll's **Metaphoric Portrait of Michael Coleman** is situated in a cottage that is a replica of the musician's home at Mount Irwin, west of Gurteen. It was commissioned by the Coleman Heritage Centre and Sligo County Council as a tribute to the memory of Coleman's musical achievements. Rather than produce a standard bust of Coleman, van der Noll has created an art installation using sound, physical movement and visual dynamics as a means to celebrate Coleman's legacy.

Four main elements make up the piece. First, a large freestanding slab of fired ceramic stoneware hangs from pulleys attached to the east wall with support rods. A steel wire stretching up and over the room connects the slab to the second element of the piece. This is the sound board. It consists of a wooden strip hinged to a ceramic slab which is fixed to the west wall. The third element, attached to the sound board, is an axle onto which two wheels are attached. The first wheel (the drive wheel) has a steel wire running over it. A second ceramic counterweight, high in the roof space, tensions this wire. This tension will spin the axle when the sound board is activated and so the second wheel (the main wheel) rotates. This will rub against the forth element of the piece. This is a taut violin string which is also attached to the sound board. Sound is thereby introduced when the whole piece is in motion.

The work springs to life through the viewer's physical interaction with the piece. On drawing down the main ceramic counterweight, the sound board is raised up and the drive wheel rotates. The movement of the main wheel against the string is amplified to fill space with a gentle drone akin to that underpinning traditional music. Reaching the peak of its cycle, the energy releases slowly for the piece to return to its equilibrium, again emitting a sonorous hum into space.

Initially, it would appear that van der Noll's piece stands in stark contrast to the musical tradition of Coleman. Its visual dynamics seem to bear a stronger relationship to the traditions of European modern art than to the South Sligo cultural terrain. However, on reflection, certain lines of thought surface to dissolve these initial antipathies. Indeed, it could be said, that the value of the work as a tribute lies in how it shimmies between a respect for tradition and respect for innovation.
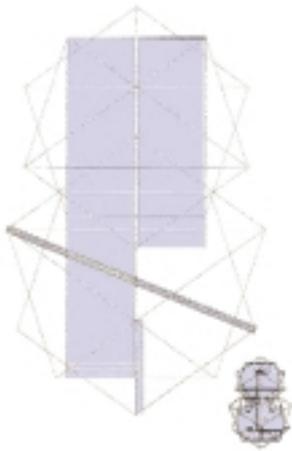
Coleman's legacy, and the deep respect for Sligo's musical traditions, is born in part from the popularity of his gramophone recordings in the first half of the twentieth century. Coleman's early wax-roll recordings were made during his time in America. The use of this latest technology ensured a wide dissemination and greater familiarity with Coleman's unique playing style. The fact that Michael's brother is believed to have been an equally talented musician but was never captured on record is testament to the influence of technological innovation in traditional music in providing a lasting legacy. Furthermore, a familiar Coleman trope, emulated by a later generation of musicians, is now understood to be the product of a trigger-happy engineer, cutting recordings short before Coleman had actually stopped playing. This bizarre technological blunder was slowly assimilated back into the very same tradition of Sligo fiddle playing. Tradition and innovation are two sides of the same coin when it comes to understanding living culture.

Local musical culture then, is one of innovation and a respectful renewal of tradition. Van der Noll's piece likewise negotiates tradition as its tribute to Coleman. The technological feat of its construction and successful operation echoes the technological innovations that secure our memory of Coleman. If the draw of the land has been a source of inspiration for generations of local musicians, it too is the principle force behind van der Noll's tribute. The gravitational pull of the land mass is central to the working of the piece. It is poised in such a manner that the initial pressure setting the piece in motion will be matched by gravity's pull to re-establish the equilibrium.

The curious relationship between the latent structure of van der Noll's piece and its architectural setting is also founded on the dynamic between tradition and innovation. The work hugs the contours of the space. The earthy ceramic slabs connect visually with each other across the room while complementing the caked sod rolls underlining the thatched roof. When activated, the piece then fills the room physically with vibrating air and its rising sound board. This kinetic spectacle breathes through the room as it comes into its own.
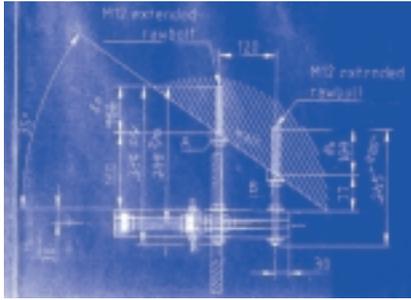
The experience, whether encountered alone or in company, can reach from bewilderment, to humour to wonder. One's sense of the sheer visual challenge in a traditional setting is balanced by the familiarity of the drone. Shifting between tradition and innovation, van der Noll's art functions as a perceptual counterpoint to Coleman's legacy. It is a technical marvel with a gravitas tuned to Coleman himself. **GM**
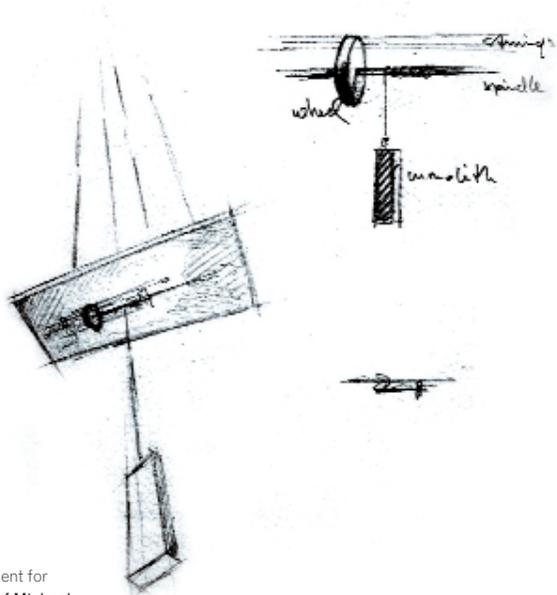
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Ron van der Noll
Conceptual development for
Metaphoric Portrait of Micheal Coleman.

Pure floating frame in space
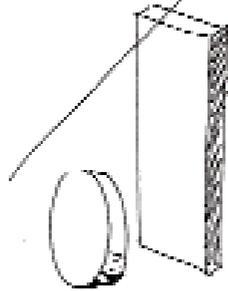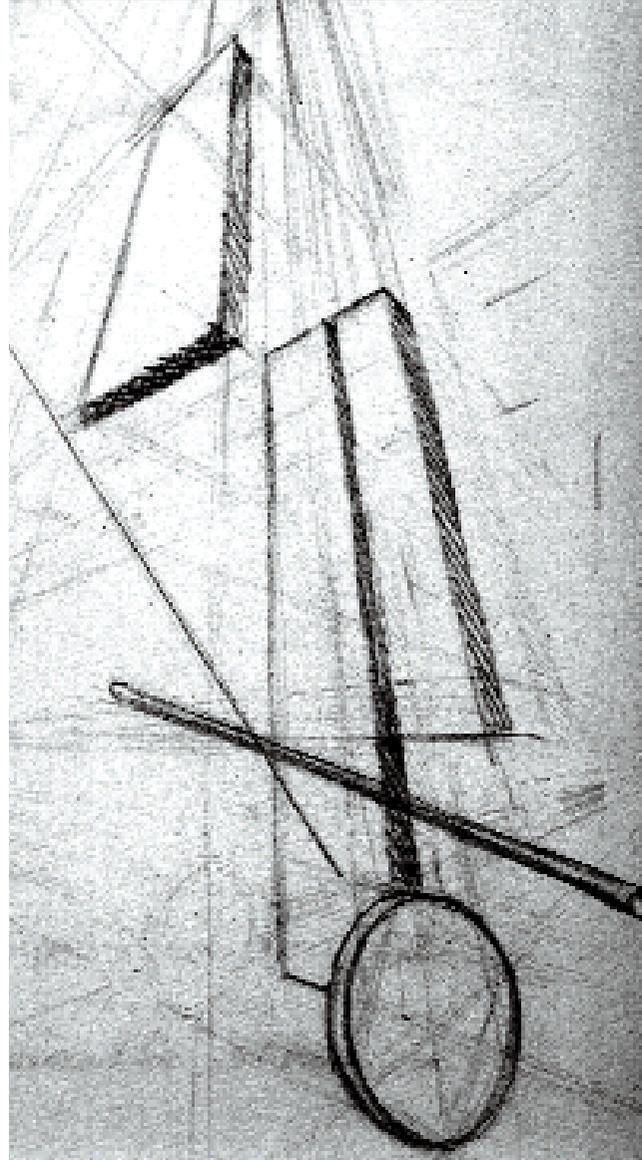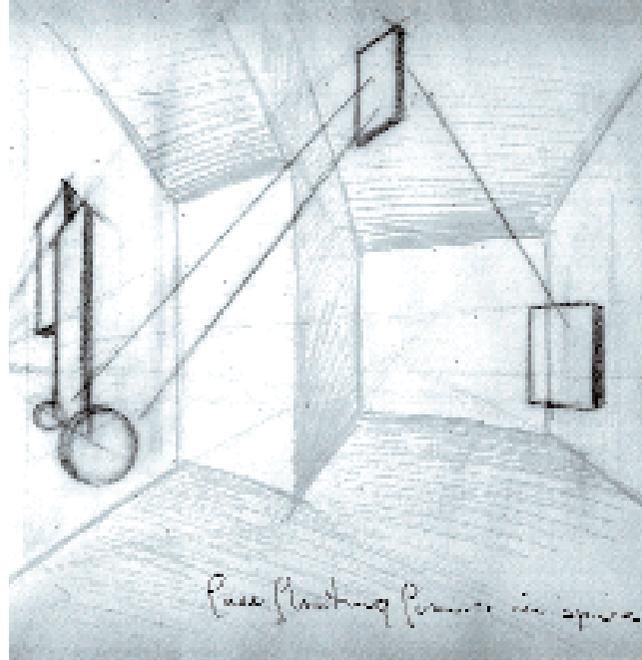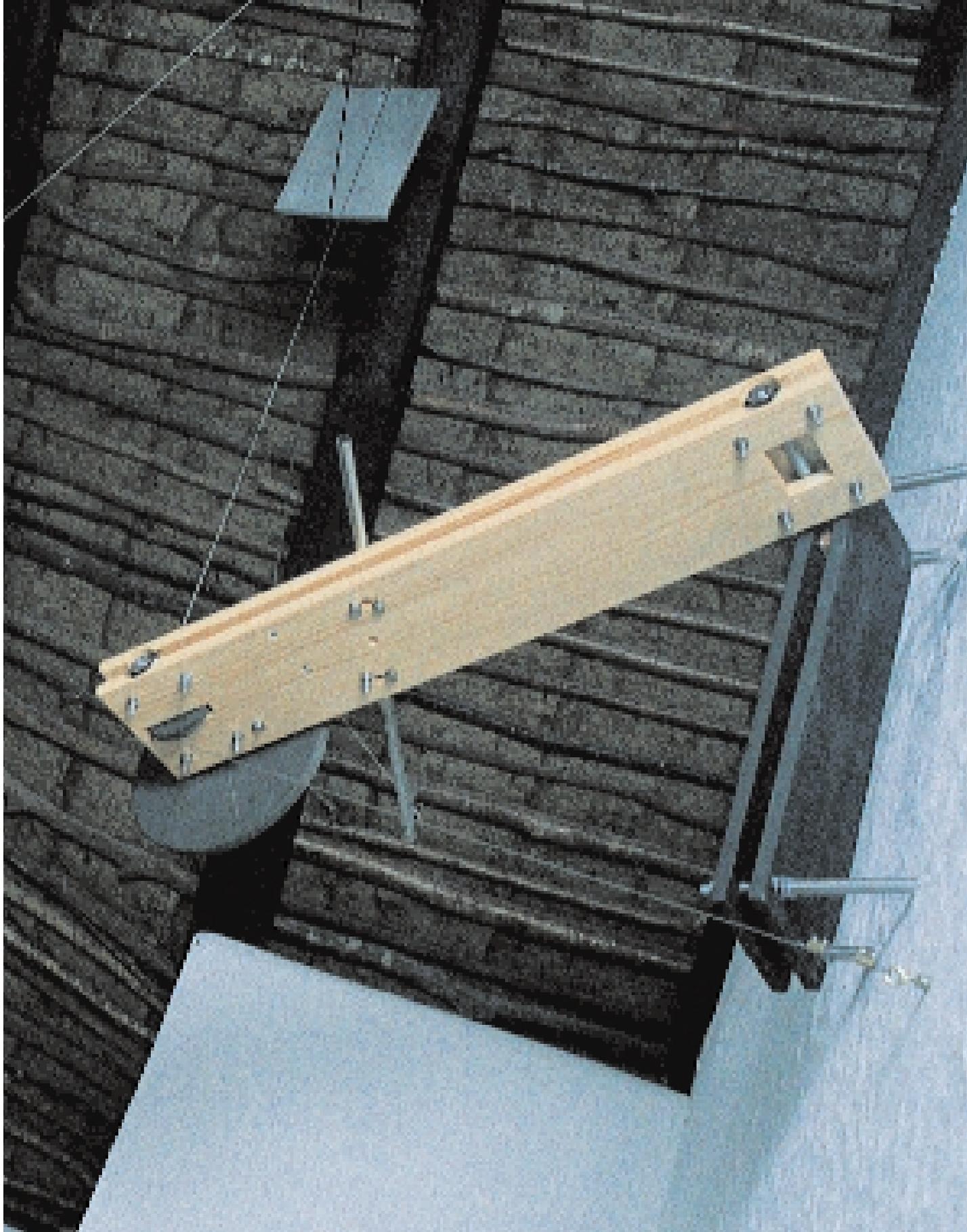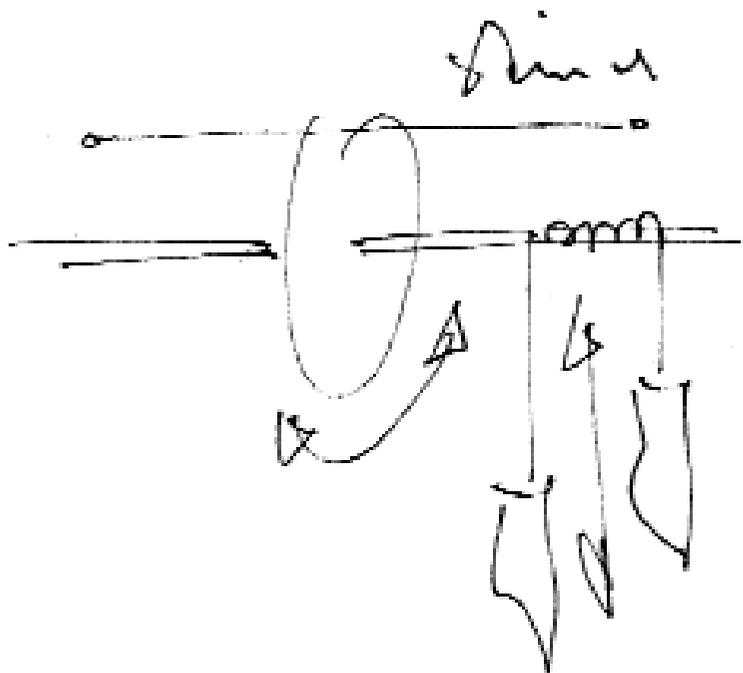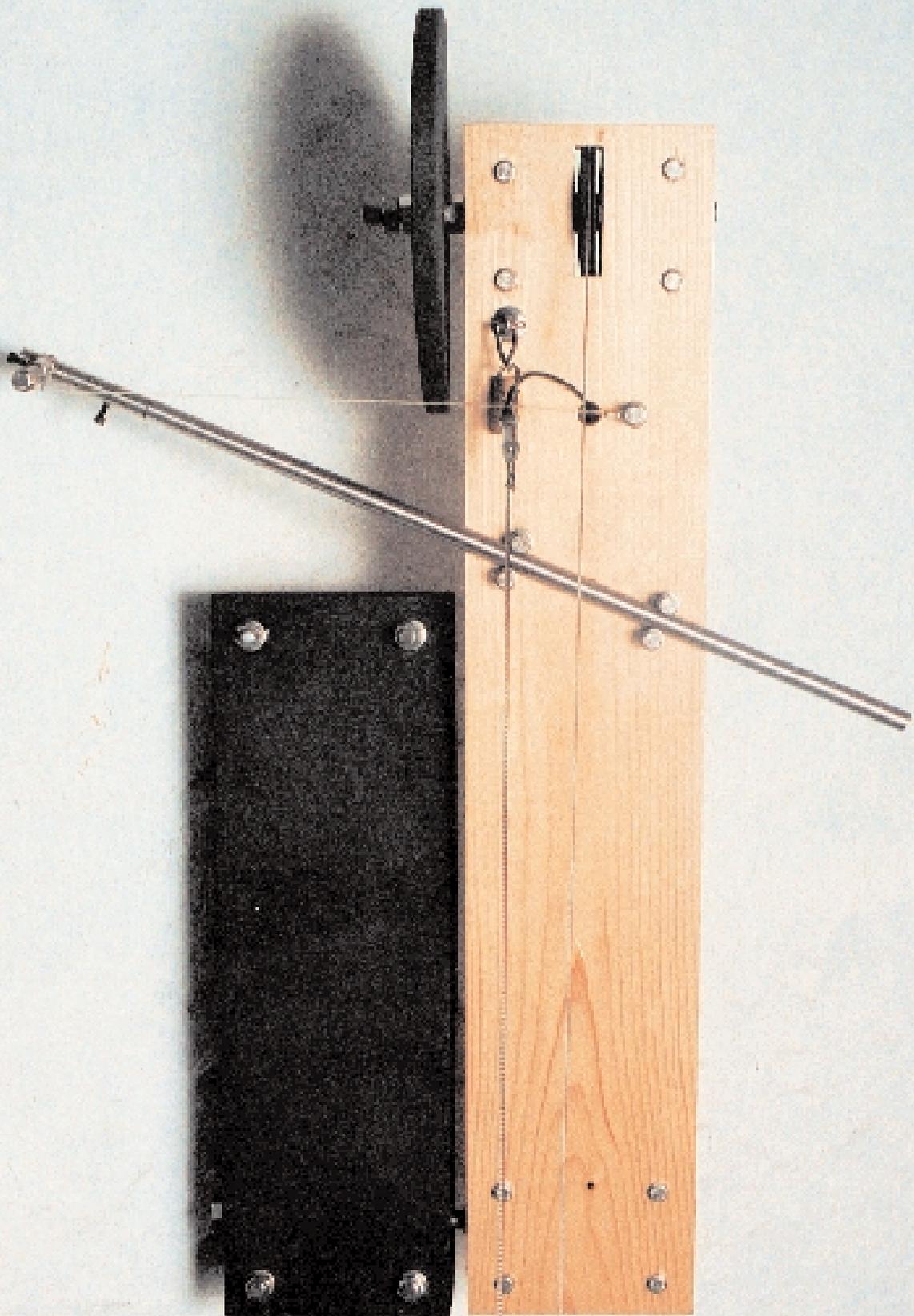
Ron van der Noll Acknowledgements

Artist Biography

Ron van der Noll was born in 1958 in in the city of Rotterdam, Holland. He now lives in Co. Kerry. From 1979 to 1983 Ron studied as an apprentice at the 'Royal Delft de Porceleyne Fles' ceramic studio in the city of Delft in Holland. In 1992 and 1993 he worked as an apprentice with Dutch leading stained glass painter Henk van Kooy.
He established a ceramic art studio in Ireland with Irish ceramic artist, Mary Moynihan, with the intention of creating ceramic art that would be recognised as a contemporary medium in visual art.
In 1996 he was awarded a prize by the Committee on Procedure and Privileges of Dail Eireann.
He was commissioned privately by the Walt Disney family in New York in 1998 and produced an architectural ceramic artwork.
In 1999 the Verbal Arts Centre in Derry, Northern Ireland commissioned an architectural ceramic work in collaboration with Irish artists, Mary Moynihan and Louis le Brocquy. The work represents a major innovation in Irish ceramic art both from an artistic and technical perspective.
Ireland's leading ceramic art gallery 'Keane on Ceramics' in Kinsale commissioned him to make a permanent ceramic art installation in 2000.
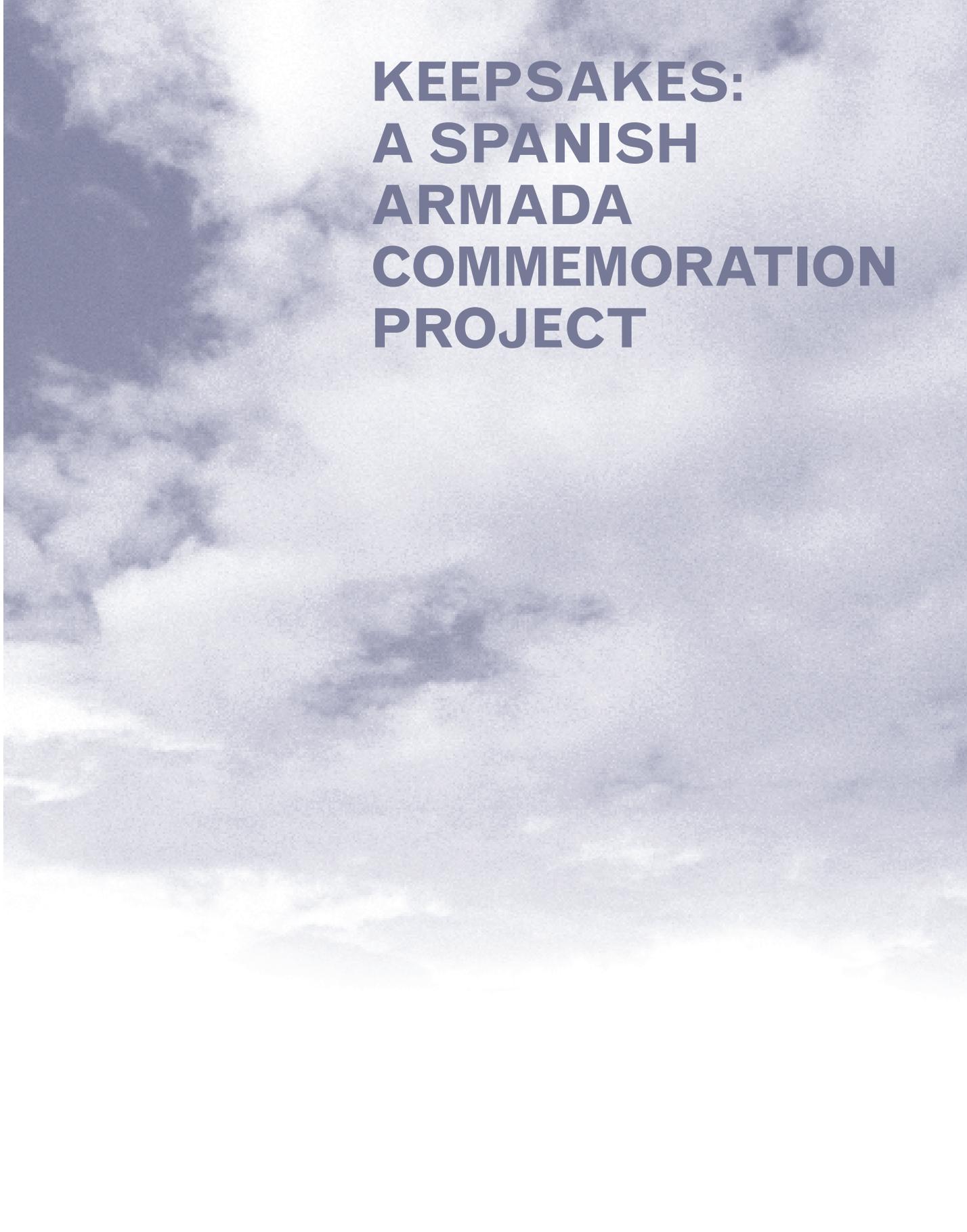
KEEPSAKES: A SPANISH ARMADA COMMEMORATION PROJECT

"…And when any of our people reached the beach, two hundred savages and other enemies fell upon him and stripped him of what he had on until he was left in his naked skin. Such they maltreated and wounded without pity, all of which was plainly visible from the battered ships, and it did not seem to me that there was anything good happening on any side…we began to see dead bodies, which was a great grief and pity to see those whom the sea continued casting up. There were stretched out upon that strand more than four hundred, among whom we recognized some."

Captain Cuellar's Narrative of the Spanish Armada

Keepsakes

Ronnie Hughes

Ronnie Hughes
Keepsakes, one of the many
mementoes which were cast in
resin for the project.

In September 1588, violent storms drove three Spanish ships from the scattered Armada fleet onto rocks off Streedagh beach. Over one thousand sailors drowned. Local inhabitants and Royal forces attacked those managing to struggle ashore. Sailors thrown up on the beach had small bags of gold coins and jewels strung to their wrists, having been paid before leaving port. There was much to be gained from local opportunism and brutality. English rulers with a tenuous hold in the west of Ireland feared the arrival of the Spanish. Should Spanish armies land and muster local forces, their position of power would be threatened. Craven want, bloodlust and disdain for the desperate amidst local power struggles would chill the air still further that night.

Commemoration through a solemn, public act is at once a remembrance and a definition of present values. The art object can be seen as the material point through which participants envelop historical memory with value.

The **Keepsakes** project by Ronnie Hughes is one such act of commemoration. Over three hundred and twenty spheres were cast in hard, transparent resin from a stone cannonball washed up on Streedagh beach from one of the Armada shipwrecks. A memento, object, poem or photograph would be placed in each of these. Each inclusion resulted from a series of workshops with various community groups. These included the Streedagh Armada Museum Society, The Ballintrillick Environmental Group, Drumcliffe Irish Countrywomen's Association, art pupils from the Grange VEC, friends of the artist and art students from Sligo Institute of Technology.

Participants were asked to contribute a piece born from a consideration of their own lives, memories and values in relation to the imagined lives of those lost on Streedagh beach. Flexibility in what could be included allowed an interweaving of numerous tales into the project. There were contributions that bore a direct relation to people's own lives. Personal artefacts such as treasured family photographs, a Christening bracelet, and in one case, a great grandfather's R.I.C. sergeant stripes were embedded in the spheres. There were also contributions

representative of an aspect of the sailors' lives. An actual embossed Armada uniform button was one such inclusion. Added to these were more enigmatic artefacts such as compasses, map fragments and various religious artefacts.

In one way then, the strength of the project grows from the tapestry of tales to be told as participants' own stories entwine with the fate of the Spanish sailors at Streedagh. This relationship would be intensified when the project came to a head on the evening of 24th June, 2000. **Keepsakes** had been nearly a year in the making. Everyone involved was invited to Streedagh beach to witness the main event. The spheres were arranged in sixteen pyramidal stacks for a stretch of a mile along the beach. As the tide crept in, the stacks would, one by one, topple gently for the sea to disperse the cannonballs – some to be drawn out into the bay, some to be pitched upon the stony ridge. And so the intensity of the project waned to begin another stage in its cycle.

Each object – each story – is cast adrift from its owner and laid open for nonchalant encounters in time. Herein lies the essence of adventure. Tales of loss meet tales of discovery. Keepsakes: something given to be kept for the sake of the giver. The found object may only hint at a story untold. It remains a promised yarn never to be heard - an enigma caught in the ebb and flow of historical memory. Giving valued material over to memory, enmeshed as it is with the Armada experience in Sligo, is a fitting remembrance for those sailors landing on Streedagh beach that night. **Keepsakes**, with its pearls of memory floating in time, is another ghostly tale to stalk the terrain. GM

Ronnie Hughes
Keepsakes, a selection of mementoes which the local community provided for the commemorative project on Streedagh Beach.
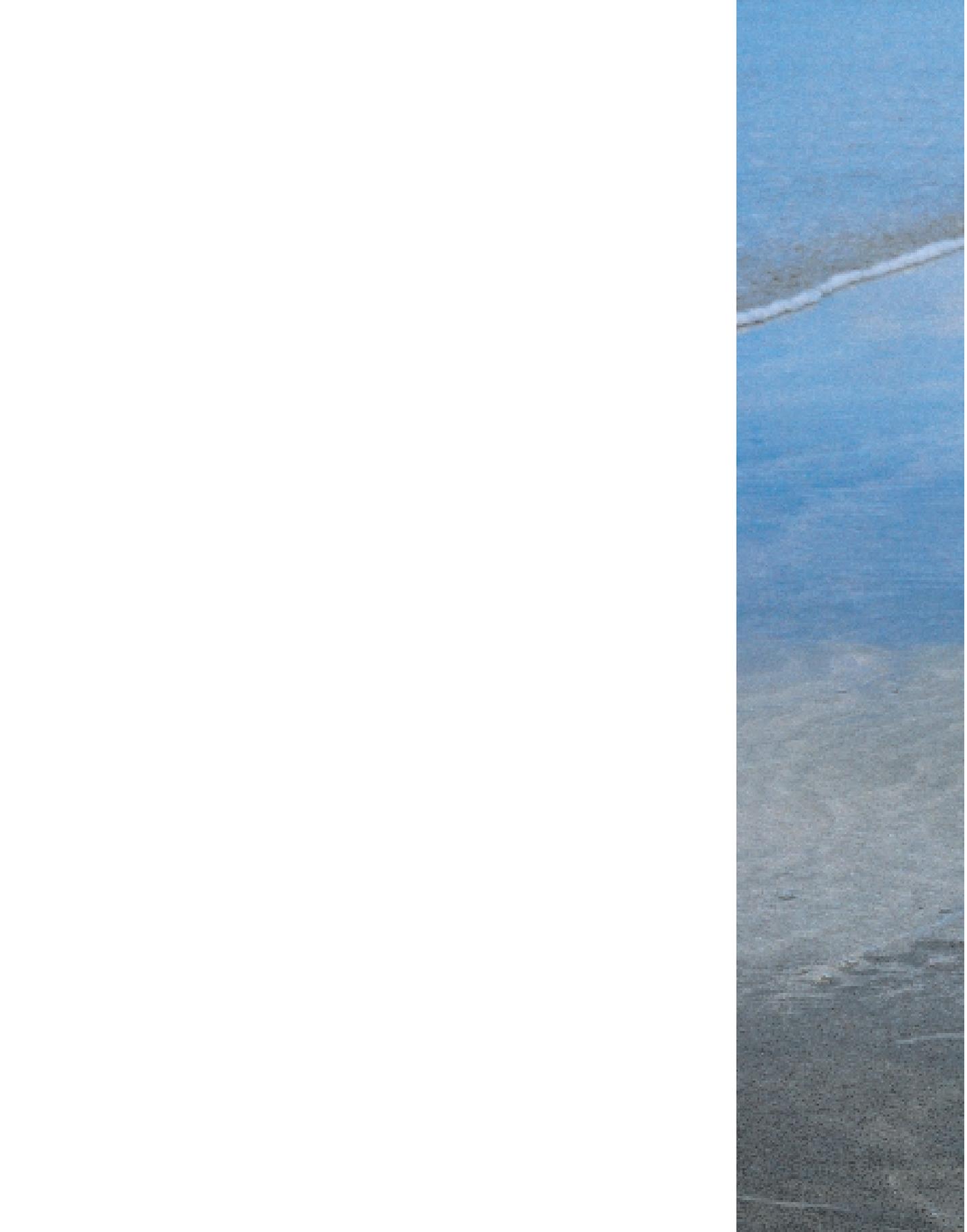
Ronnie Hughes Acknowledgements

Elizabeth Byrne + Vivion Kinsella, Liz Caffrey, Don Cotton, Bernie Gallagher, Susanne Greven, Jenny Haughton, Liam Kelly, Joe Leonard, Aidan Linehan + Maggie O'Brien, Con Lynch, Mary McAuliffe, Mary McDonagh, Nuala Moloney & Jackie Lynch, Christina Mackey, John Maguire, Barry McGinley-Jones, Andy Moynihan

Artist Biography

Ronnie Hughes was born in Belfast in 1965. From 1984 to 1989 he studied at the University of Ulster, receiving both his BA and MA in Fine Art. He has had numerous solo exhibitions throughout Ireland (most recently at the Fenderesky gallery, Belfast) and has participated in group exhibitions in America, Canada, Germany, Japan, Poland and the United Kingdom. He has been the recipient of numerous awards including a one-year residency in New York (PS1,1990-91) and three-month residencies at Banff Arts Center, Canada (1994) and Bemis Arts Center, Nebraska (1997). His work is held in many public and corporate collections including both Irish Arts Councils and the Irish Museum of Modern Art. The artist currently lives and works in Sligo and is represented by the Rubicon Gallery, Dublin.
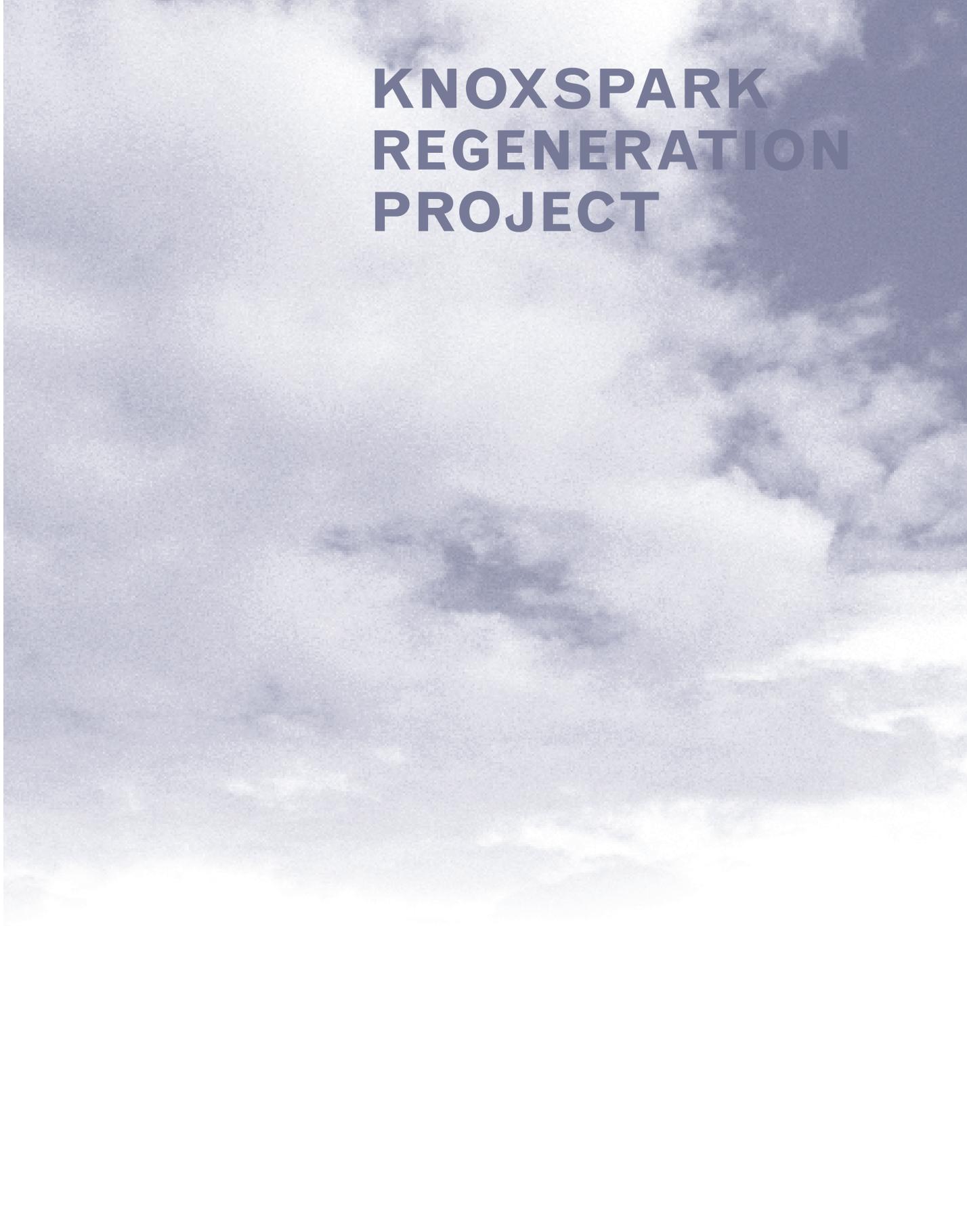
KNOXSPARK REGENERATION PROJECT
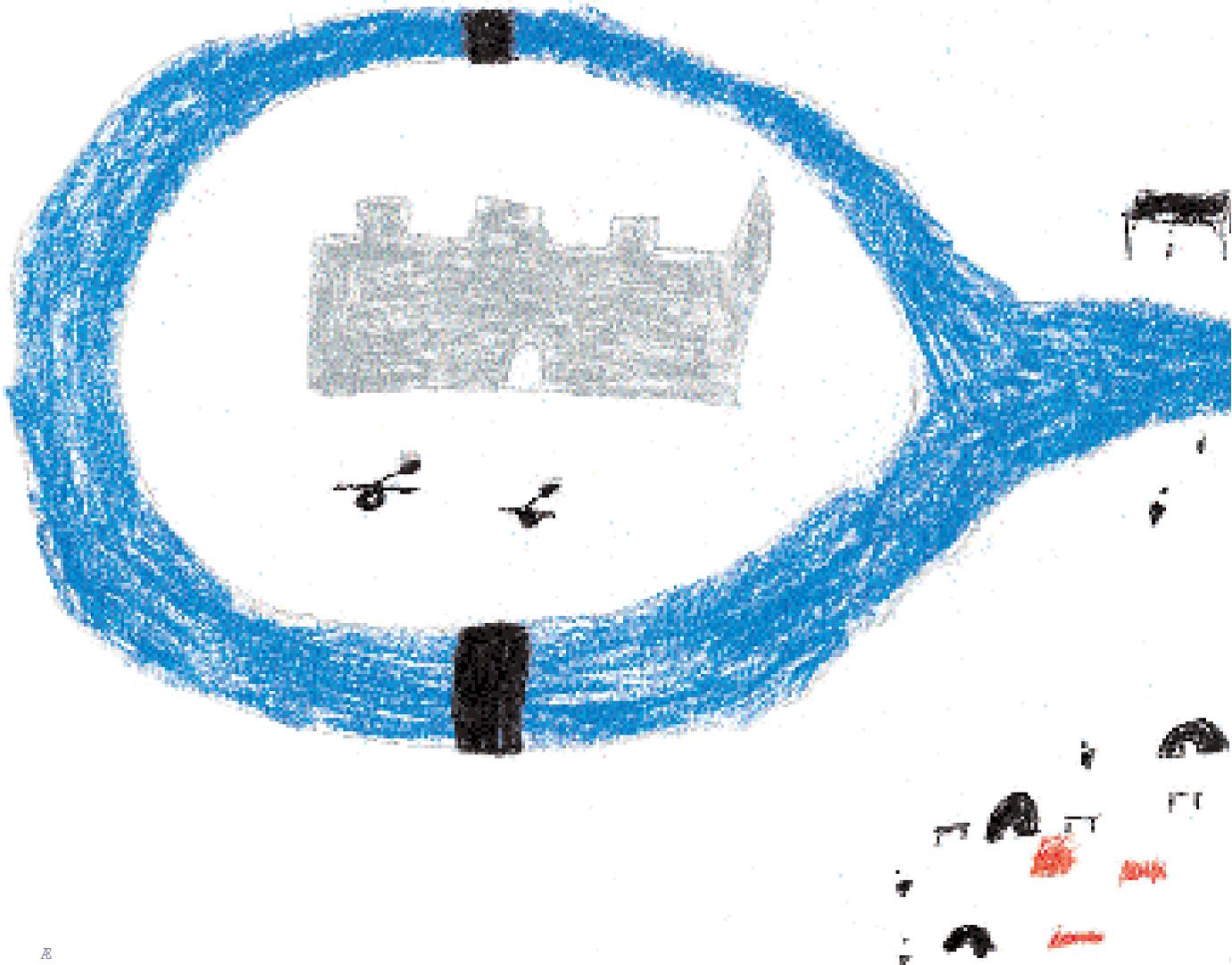
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Darren Goulden, 12 yrs
Drawing of Knoxspark area.

Knoxspark Regeneration Project

Martina Coyle, Hilary Gilligan and Pauline O'Connell

Regeneration, commissioned by Sligo County Council, brings together three artists, Martina Coyle, Hilary Gilligan and Pauline O'Connell. The project aims to regenerate a site in the townland of Knoxspark. The site is a large expanse of land divided by the N4 dual carriageway. The idea of three artists, from diverse backgrounds, to collaborate on a venture of this kind is perhaps unique in Ireland. It is unique in that it not only sets a precedent with its collaborative element, which extends from the three artists to the teams of workers, experts and local participants involved, but that the nature of the intervention questions what we normally hold to be art.

The challenge to invigorate the area centres on the development of a public path through the site. Various artistic features and utilities have been added to enhance the walking experience. Two large orientation stones placed on sites at dual entrance points of the path open the viewer to various aspects of interest along the way. Seating, made from semi-honed fossilised limestone, has been added to enhance the enjoyment of views to Union Wood and the Knocknarea Mountain. An eight tonne, limestone 'pillow stone' has also been placed near the raised mound and indigenous trees and shrubs are now to be planted to enrich the terrain.

These aspects fulfil the utilitarian demands of the project. However, **Regeneration** is grounded by a weightier ethos. Its value is rooted in a sensitivity to the locale. To undertake the walk is to be opened to matters of archaeology, ecology, aesthetics and the community. Including these into the mindful drift of a stroll binds these wider considerations to disparate elements of everyday life.

Historically, Knoxspark was an important crossing point on an ancient road linking Ulster to Connaught. The site overlooks this crossing point and is enclosed on three sides by the Oxbow bend in the Ballysadare River. An inland promontory fort built around the seventh century and an enclosed multiperiod cemetery were found on the site. Evidence also shows that the area was used for early industrial and agricultural purposes as well as being a place of habitation. A sub-rectangular enclosure survives and the Knoxspark Roundel – a decorated gold and

Knoxspark
Hilary Gilligan research for the
Pillow Stone

amber disc – is a significant archaeological find for the region. Charles Mount's excavation report claims the site has one of the largest early medieval burial grounds in Connaught. Cairns and human remains have been unearthed. Several skulls were found set between stones. The head was understood to be the seat of the soul and hence protection in the form of pillow stones had been given to some of the buried remains.

To work **Regeneration** into this history is a delicate matter. The site demands solemnity and artistic intervention runs the risk of undermining such reverence. The key, for the three collaborating artists, lay in adopting an understated approach to art-making. Several engravings on the orientation stones alert the visitor to the archaeological significance lying beneath their feet. The 'pillow stone', a large boulder with a step cut into it, invites the visitor to engage with the site. Stepping up, the visitor can lie back on the boulder with their head cushioned in three water rolled stones that are set onto it. Lying in an east-west position, the visitor mirrors the orientation of the burials below. This helps tint the view of the Union Rock with knowledge of the initial significance of pillow stones. To adopt this low-key approach to the site is less a matter of limiting intervention than of understanding the gravity of the slightest adjustment to the locale.

Hazelnut, wild cherry, sloe, holly, hawthorn drawn on the orientation stone, were found with inhumed burials. This triggered the interest in re-introducing indigenous trees, plants and vegetation as an element of the project. The three artists worked in consultation with Don Cotton, author of the environmental study of the area. His knowledge has been a useful resource in the planning of the project. A mixed hedge of hawthorn, holly, wild cherry, hazel, spindle, guelder rose and sloe is to be planted on the raised area close to the area of grassland defined by the meander of the Ballysadare River. This will protect the area by absorbing traffic noise close by. Willow, ash, birch, yew, whitebeam and oak have also been selected, as indeed, have edible plants such as damson, crab apple and hazel. A pond has been introduced to create a more diverse ecological habitat. It will be

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Knoxspark
Artists, Pauline O'Connell, Martina Coyle and Hilary Gilligan during the on site development of the regeneration project

surrounded by several species of willow to give further protection to local wildlife. These include breeding mallards, grey herons and dippers. The overarching principle is to protect the wildness of the area by avoiding obtrusive landscaping.

Sensitivity to the locale is also a matter of involving the community in the process of making **Regeneration** happen. This has been achieved through developing a close working relationship with those involved directly in its making. Builders, the engineer, the archaeologist, and members of the community consulted along the way, have, among others, been drawn into this venture. The artists also facilitated workshops in all the primary schools in the two nearby villages for pupils to create drawings for the orientation stones. David Goulden's image of the inland promontory fort was then selected and set into one of the stones. Local involvement in making various elements for the project plants the community into the very heart of these environs.

Regeneration seeks to nurture ecological awareness, archaeological significance and community spirit through art. Each decision – whether it be to echo the contour of the river in the shapes cut out of the oxbow seats or encouraging imaginative flights as viewer's lay their head upon the pillow stones – is grounded in this principle. The site will take many years for the planting to flourish fully. This extends the life of this artwork. In the end, **Regeneration**, is a matter of participation. To walk this site is to be enveloped in a locale sodden with history. It is to be treated to a journey where an art with its low-key aesthetic seeps quietly through the veins. To return again and again to this locale enables one to set personal affairs against minor shifts of a grander natural force. **GM**
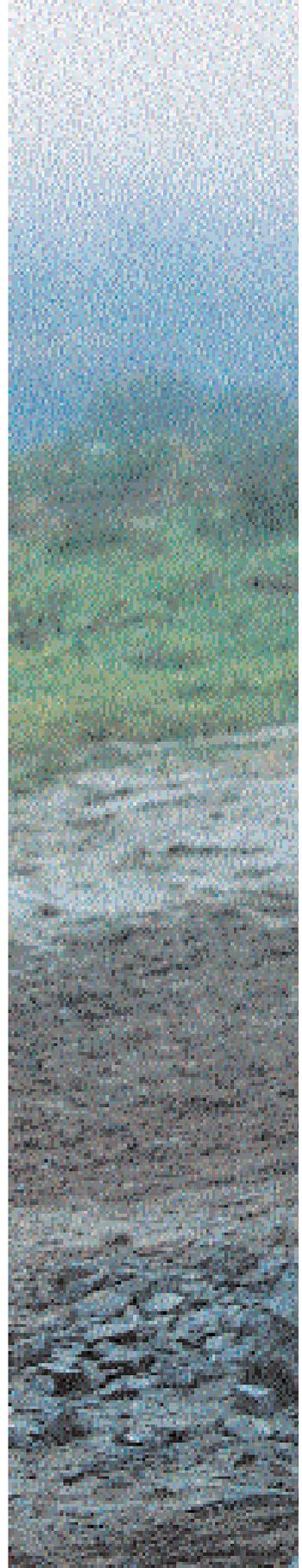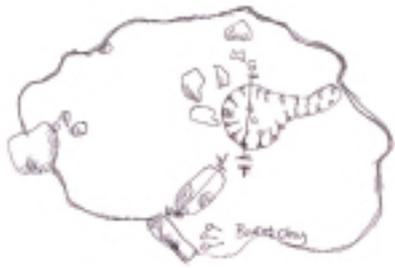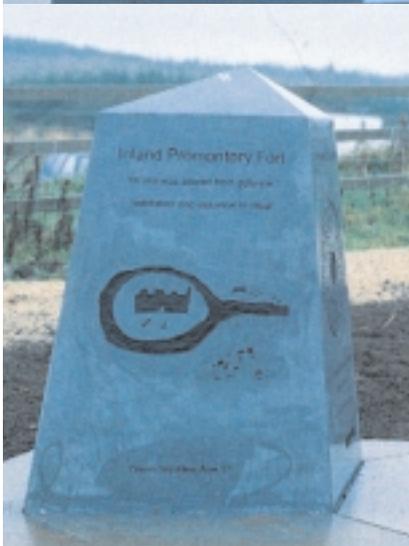
REGENERATION

has re-introduced plant species
which were found with the
inhumed burials

Wild Cherry

Hawthorn

Hazelnut   Holly   Sloe

Martina Coyle, Hilary Gilligan, Pauline O'Connell
Acknowledgements

Artist's Biographies

Martina Coyle is based in Co. Sligo. She studied Glass Design at NCAD (1990) and Art Therapy at Fermanagh College (1999). She was awarded a Public Art Commission for a one-month symposium of permanent sculpture in Germany (1994), co-ordinated and facilitated children's art workshops at 'La Forge' in Paris (1994-5), and, worked on community art workshops on the project, 'People, Places, Stories' in Maugherow, Co. Sligo (1999 - 2000). Her work was included in the NCAD's 250th Anniversary Exhibition (1996), "Portes Ouvertes", La Forge Paris (1995) and Green on Red Gallery, Dublin (1992). She has had solo exhibitions at the Logan Gallery (1998) and the Temple Bar Gallery (2000).

Hilary Gilligan, from Sligo, has a Diploma in New Media Arts, Ontario College of Art, Toronto (1989), MA Fine Art, University of Ulster, and, a Diploma in Community Arts and Development from Maynooth University. She lecturers at Sligo Institute of Technology. She has been awarded the following commissions: "Inniu is Inné", a Holographic Installation, permanent public artwork, Donegal Town by-pass, Donegal County Council (2000); "Lingering Emotion", temporary public art pilot project in the National Ballroom, commissioned by Dublin Corporation (1996), and, "Articulate Exhibit B", Arthouse, Temple Bar, Dublin in 1997.

Pauline O'Connell studied Fine Art at Dun Laoghaire College of Art and Design (1992). She is the Artistic and Technical Director of The Firestation Artists' Studios in Dublin. Pauline teaches at the DLIADT and has taught at the Webster University in Vienna. She has been the children's art facilitator at the Hugh Lane Municipal Gallery (1995 -). Commissions include, 'Convergence', a public art project in Waterford (1998-9), The Liam Lynch Memorial, Co. Tipperary and '100 Years of Austrian Cinema'. Group exhibitions include, 'Delicate Tissue' M.Y. Art Prospects, New York (2000), Sculpture at Kells, Co. Kilkenny; 'Sculpture in Context', Malahide Castle Gardens, and EV+A, Limerick City Gallery of Art.

OWNING THE SPACE

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Owning the Space
Cranmore local authority housing
estate, the source of Imelda
Peppard's public event

Owning the Space

Imelda Peppard

Owning the Space was a public event created by Imelda Peppard and commissioned by Sligo Corporation. The space in question is the Cranmore local authority housing estate. The idea of ownership in the title refers to the question of power when a community gains control of the space in which they live. Peppard marks this process by producing an event rooted in the experiences of the community and based on their interactions with the physical layout of the estate. It was performed in the Rockwood Youth and Leisure Centre on 27th September, 2000.

The performance had three main elements. First, there was the central involvement of various members of the Cranmore community. Second, there were the sculptural features created by Peppard. These included giant canopies that the Cranmore Women's Group assisted in completing by painting designs on silk material. These would then be stretched over the metal canopy frames. The colour and size of these sculptural elements added a spectacular dimension to the event. Finally, the physical and sculptural elements of the piece were overlaid with a soundtrack. This was built up from recorded interviews with residents, familiar sounds from the area and musical compositions by Jho Harris, Aileen Donagher and Ivan Gibson.

Capturing accurately the history and experiences of the Cranmore residents was crucial to the venture, not least as residents had previous experiences with the national press that were felt to misrepresent the locality. Peppard developed a familiarity with the area through numerous meetings and recorded interviews with the various groups and individuals within the estate. These included the Senior Citizen's Group, the Women's Group and the Youth Group.

Accounts of the early days of the estate, when residents first moved in twenty-five years ago, arose from these meetings. The delight of many at having moved out of overcrowded housing was mixed with the shock of not knowing any of the neighbours and receiving crippling electricity bills at a time of high unemployment in the Sligo area. More stories emerged of how a community started to develop from station masses organised in the area. As this initial contact developed,

residents took steps to improve the living conditions around them. The 'hut', for example, was erected to provide a communal meeting point. Further accounts brought this history up to date. They told of how one of the houses was turned into a resource centre (now the Resource House Centre) and how the above mentioned community groups were formed. They also spoke of the construction of the Community Centre on the site of the original 'hut' as another direct result of community action.

The development of a community occurred in spite of the physical layout of the estate. A maze of intercutting roads and back alleys surrounding uniform rows of housing made for an anonymous setting. Footpaths ended suddenly so mothers were forced to bring their children out on the road. Numerous sets of steps also hindered the movement of mothers with prams. Large grassy mounds eclipse resident's views of their neighbours to further a sense of isolation and a lack of control over space. This lack of defensible space made the area vulnerable to crime. Steps have now been taken to offset some these features.

This knowledge, coupled with Peppard's experience in street theatre and community arts, provided the foundation for Peppard to draw these community histories and experiences into her central design.

The idea behind the event was to break the performance into two distinct halves. The first part of the event opens with participating members of the community erecting a labyrinth structure consisting of individual 'L' shaped pieces. These are made from untreated nylon stretched over metal frames. This network of passages fills the hall. A sense of enclosure dominates the space, echoing the physical environment of the Cranmore Estate. A laden soundtrack reinforces this oppressive mood. Interview extracts recalling the early days on Cranmore and the noise of lorry engines cut into the musical accompaniment. The soundtrack is filled with tension. There is the sense of a community entrapped, as if change was in the hands of others rather than in those of the community.

A youthful voice and the sound of playing children puncture this mood to

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Owning the Space
Video stills documenting the process and involvement of the community group from Cranmore local authority housing estate.

Owning the Space
Video still showing Imelda
Peppard's preparatory work for
Owning The Space.

introduce the second part of the event. 'Everybody loves where they're living, that's where they're reared; where you live is who you are'. This mark of pride coincides with the dismantling of the labyrinth. Space opens up and four light canopies of multicoloured, painted Chinese silk are unfolded like giant umbrellas. Each canopy stretches eighteen feet in diameter. Theatrical lighting enhances the delicate beauty of each and the soundtrack slows to a gentle pace. Viewers get a sense of community aspiration and empowerment as the soundtrack fades to leave each canopy spinning gently in space.

This is a work as much about local pride as it is a testament to all of those who have helped in building a community. The determination to present the event in the centre of Sligo is a sign of a spirit that was not always there. There is a sense that this signals the end of a chapter in the estate's history. 'It was like a real big family working together', as one member states on the soundtrack. To mark this achievement, through an art that is at once spectacular and uplifting, is certainly a dramatic end to a difficult opening chapter. **GM**

Imelda Peppard Acknowledgements

Cranmore Women's Group:
Phyllis McGuinness, Eileen McMorrow, Evelyn Tiernan, Margaret McGuinn, Breege Keegan, Marie Gunning, Julian Wallace, Patricia Molloy, Pauline Conlon, Margaret Lynch, Sr Maureen Dolan, Jennifer Tiernan, Michelle McMorrow. The Senior Citizens Group, Cranmore The Fourteen+ Club of '99: Resource House Project

Sound
Children singing: Amy McMorrow, Niamh McMorrow, Keeley Somers, Rachel Tiernan, Cassie Byrne
Sound Track: Edited and mixed by Jho Harris and Sinead McClure of All Points West Radio Services. 'Mels Tune' composed for the project by Jho Harris. Additional Music arranged and recorded for the project by Aileen Donagher and Ivan Gibson. Additional Sounds: Mick Walsh and Cillian Rogers.

Lighting Design and Engineering
Jean Louis Baudry

Choreography
John Breen

Props Engineering
Cillian Rogers

Silk Painting
Technical assistance Batik artist Mary Lee Murphy Also: Jill Bell, Wendy Kockman and Fr Sean Page for their assistance in the performance. The Model Arts & Niland Gallery for supporting this performance

Artist Biography

Imelda Peppard was born in Dublin in 1955. She graduated from NCAD in 1978 and moved to West Sligo. Imelda and partner, Cillian Rogers, converted the Workhouse at Dromore West into a home and art studios. She has developed her artwork through visual theatre, sculpture and carnival. She worked with Sligo Community Arts Group from 1985-1994 creating carnival costume, puppets and props for street performances. In 1997 Imelda along with fellow artists, Jean Connelly, Dominic Cambell and Cillian Rogers set up the visual theatre company, Bacchanal. The Company has produced work for events both in the South and North of Ireland and most recently for the World Exposition 2000 in Hanover, Germany. Imelda has also worked extensively with community groups and theatre companies, teaching practical design and building skills in fibres, sculpture, costume and props. Her main interest is in the exploration of materials from steel to silk in creating sculptural form whether it is temporary or permanent.
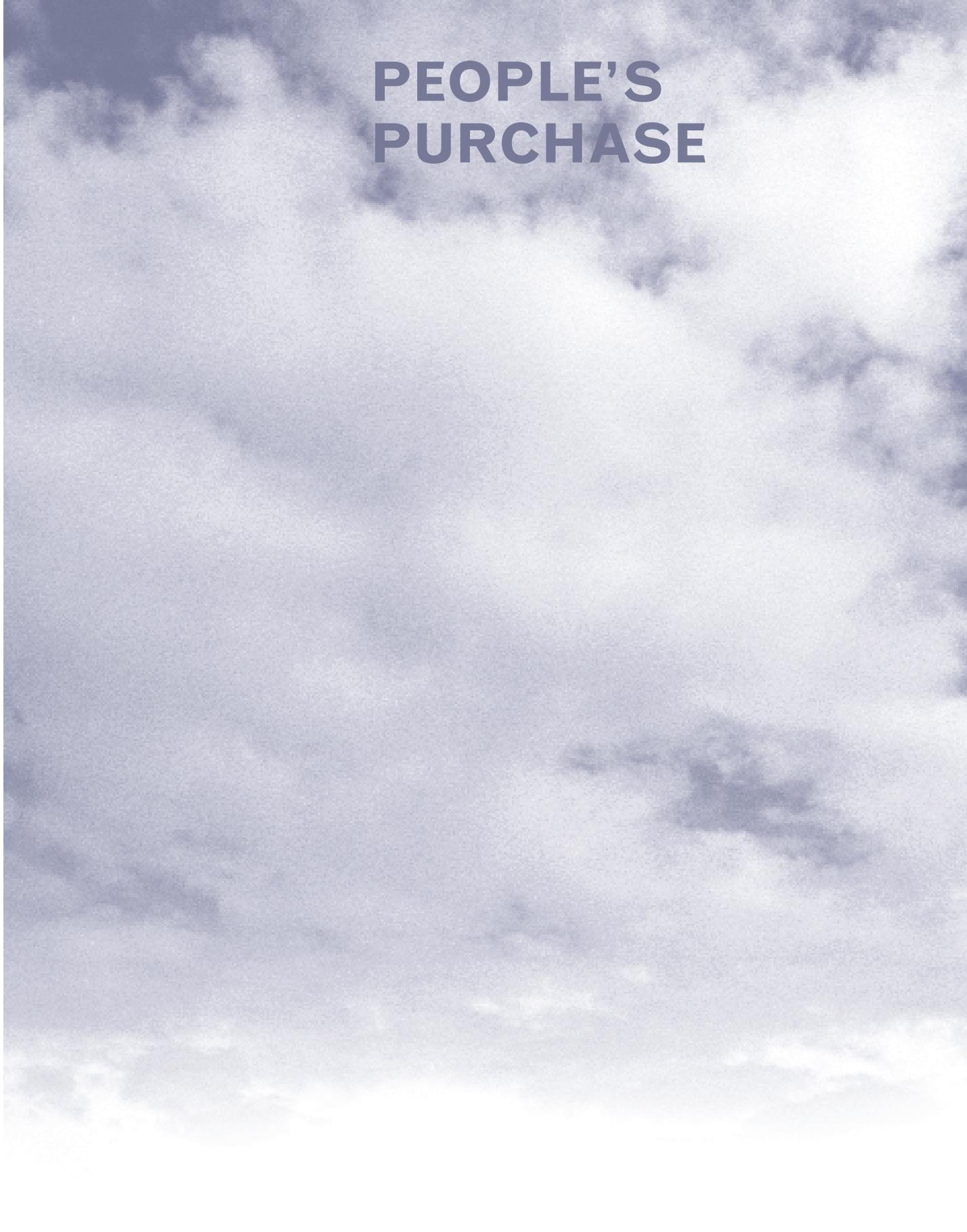
PEOPLE'S PURCHASE

"We, the members of the Weighbridge Purchasing Group, have the honour of making the first presentation to the People's Art Collection. The time and care we put into our choice was both a challenge and a great sense of achievement to us… we hope those who glance, look at, or study them will get the same pleasure and delight as we did in finding them."

Vincent French

"I was not very exposed to or aware of different types of art and culture. Now I feel I know a lot more."

Sheila McLoughlin

People's Purchase

Selected by Members of the Weighbridge housing scheme and the Mailcoach area.

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Ronnie Hughes
Breathe (detail),
one of the selected
paintings for the People's
Purchase for City Hall.

The idea behind the **People's Purchase** is for a group, made up of various members from the local community, to select an artwork for the newly refurbished City Hall. Many in the group were unknown to each other and unfamiliar with contemporary art practice at the beginning of the project. However, over the course of a year, the group worked together with various artists and experts in the art field to become more familiar with the often hidden working practices of contemporary artists and the concerns of contemporary art in general. Eventually, two works of art were selected in the light of knowledge attained and with careful consideration of where the selected art might be placed in the City Hall. This was no mean feat given that one difficulty facing the group was that the City Hall was, at the time, a building in transformation. The two works were paintings by a Sligo based artist, Ronnie Hughes, titled **Ghost Workers** (1991) and **Breathe** (1995).

The Arts Officer formed the purchasing group with the assistance of the Mailcoach Road Community Centre in April 1999. Sligo Corporation secured project funding by applying the Department of Environment's Per Cent for Art Scheme to the building of the Weighbridge housing scheme. The group comprised of residents from the Weighbridge housing scheme, the Mailcoach Road area and participants in the activities of the Mailcoach Road Centre. The group members were Vincent French, Liam Lavin, Matt McColgan, Sean McCrann, Sheila McLoughlin, Pat McLoughlin, Brendan Morris, Bernie Rippon and Karl Summers.

The journey to choose the work presented many challenges for the group along the way. A number of guided gallery visits to the Niland Collection of Jack B. Yeats' work and Irish Museum of Modern Art, among others, stimulated debate as to what a suitable purchase may be by expanding knowledge and familiarity with contemporary practice. Visits to artists' studios, under further guidance by Catherine Marshall (IMMA), were also a crucial element in transforming the delicate balance between a willingness to learn and a certain scepticism, if not frustration, before challenging work, into an earnest search for a prime candidate. All along the way, the group was ghosted by the civic responsibility underpinning their endeavour.

When a selection of artworks was finally drawn up from the submissions of eight artists, the tough task of choosing one now lay ahead. Regular artist's talks and slide shows were an important spark for debate. Weekly group meetings worked through the debates to home in on their choice. However, the initial choice of **The Stone Boat**, Alan Counihan's sculpture inspired by the large boulder known as St. Enda's Boat on Inismór, failed to come to fruition. This was, in part, a matter of not having a site where the sculpture could command a space of is own in the building. This set in motion an extended search and further debate which was finally resolved on selecting Hughes' paintings.

Evaluations of the work by those involved give a sense of where debate settled. For Matt McColgan, **Breathe** was a reminder of 'our short existence and of people passing each other like ships in the night'. Brendan Morris also found pleasure in exploring the imaginative depths of the piece, recalling Kavanagh's line, 'On a quiet street where old ghosts meet'. The value of the piece, with its layered images of anonymous figures amidst worked up pigment, lay in its evocative passage of time. Vincent French and Liam Lavin build on this in noting the subtle different between 'what you see and what you think you see' and how different generations can view it differently. Hughes' exploration of immigrant experience in **Ghost Workers** is built up with typified images of Irish constructions and various associated materials. Many group members found a closeness and familiarity of the subject. Matt McColgan, Sean McCrann, and Brendan Morris all found local connections with the piece, recalling the raw experience of emigration from the west in recent history. Likewise, Bernie Rippon found both pieces evoked an image of 'working people and changing lifestyles in Ireland'.

The gravity of the project drew attention to the value of the choice as a local experience. Considering the placement of the artworks through ongoing visits to the City Hall in various stages of its refurbishment also helped the group to focus attention on the local dimension of the project. But, given the comments of all involved, the value of the project also lay in the bond formed between the group

through the learning experience. **The People's Purchase**, then, is a mark of civic pride. This can be found in the responsibility given to the group. It can be found in their choice of a locally based artist. It can also be found in the spirit by which the group took up the challenge. **GM**

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Peoples Purchase
Members of the selection commitee who visited the artist, Maud Cotter, during the selection process.

"It was lovely that a group
of complete strangers
came together and now
have a nice common bond
and will remain friends."

Pat McLoughlin

"I wouldn't have bothered to look at paintings two years ago. Yesterday I stopped and looked."
Sean McCrann

People's Purchase Acknowledgements

UNDERSWIM

Underswim

Laura Gannon

Laura Gannon's **Underswim** is a film work commissioned by Sligo Corporation. It now forms part of the municipal permanent collection. Shot in 16mm, the work depicts in close up a middle-aged female figure situated in the Old Jail in Sligo. Her body sways back and forth in and out of the film frame, the eyes opening for her gaze to shift rhythmically in space. The additional soundtrack, composed by Ronan Coleman, acts as a subtle counterpoint to this movement. Together, these elements invite viewers to delve beneath the surface and take soundings of its possible depths.

The piece is the end result of a yearlong working process. Two strands characterise research from the initial stages of the project to the film shoot. Both strands converge in the final film piece to induce the central dynamic of the piece.

The first involved forging and developing community links within Sligo itself. The Sligo Living History and Heritage Group were identified as holding a particular promise for the artist after preliminary meetings with a number of groups. Founded in 1994 and based in the Holborn Hill Resource Centre, the Sligo Living History and Heritage Group[1] consist of a core group of women centring their activities on the production of quality historical costumes for film, theatre and commemorative events. Specialist training in historical fashion design and skills in historical research are also offered to participants. The primary aim of this group lies in its commitment to awakening talents in the local community.

In tune with this ethos, Gannon conducted a series of workshops with six members of the group. The idea was to develop awareness of the body in space in preparation for filming. This centred on uncovering ritual elements in everyday domestic routine. Participants also produced a number of red dresses as material to be used in the final imagery. The value of such activities for both artist and participants lay in strengthening further bonds through the shared group experience and a deepened self-awareness through experimentation. For the group in particular, there was also the added pleasure of identifying more keenly with the often hidden processes in the making of art.

Laura Gannon
c-type print with
Underswim

[1] Now the Irish History Company

The second strand concerns the search for an apt environment in which to film The idea was to find a disused public building with which to ground events. The Old Jail was selected for aesthetic and practical reasons. It stands as a physical reminder of a near silent past, hinting tales of hushed shame, anguished souls, containment and correction. As matter for art, it is ripe with allusion as a disused structure of authority for the body.

After a series of preliminary film sketches involving the Living History and Heritage Group, one member, Carmel Seery, became the main focus for the film shoot in the prison confines. Her actions were shaped in part by the various explorations in the workshop series. Her actions on film would also be saturated with the various connotations and reverberations given off by the specific setting.

The film opens with a soft drone and focuses close in on Carmel's face as it sways slowly, dipping in and out of the frame. The figure is set against the blue-white painted backdrop of the prison wall. An initial glance could take this as skyline, particularly as a breeze wafts through some loose hair wisps. The faint shadow falling on the wall, however, plays up this artifice. Further enquiry reveals that lime was mixed in with blue pigment to give the paint on the prison wall antiseptic properties. This connotation heightens tension between the body contained within prison space and that which physically encloses it. Breeze, and the open space it suggests, thereby contrasts with the sense of enclosure on a number of levels.

The narrative develops further with the eyes flickering beneath their lids, recalling deep sleep where dreaming takes place. The eurhythmy of body, movement and sound amidst cold blue airy space is shattered only by the eyes opening – an event matched by a sharp rupturing of the soundscape with a noise resembling a crack on metal pipes. Such sounds continue to puncture space, all the time mapping shifts and flicks of the figure's eyes. These gradually recede to be replaced by milder sounds of rubbed metal as the figure's gaze penetrates the air around before the image finally fades.

Underswim is complemented by a series of c-type prints to be shown in conjunction with the film. They frame a female figure in the prison corridor approaching the point at which the viewer is allowed entry into the scene. The eyeline is set low and off centre as if to frame the viewer as a voyeur crouched low. We witness a distant spectral presence which then looms large as she encroaches on the viewer's space in the following image. The figure, dressed in red, comes to dominate the space like a ghostly rising, absorbing her confines as she grows in stature.

Underswim with its accompanying imagery takes the viewer to spaces around expression: aural, visual and mental. The viewer is drawn to read every gesture and inflexion of the moving body, pulling on the various elements orbiting the figure in the effort to make the body legible. But each of these elements – whether it be echoes in the soundtrack or the rich colouration highlighting the red of the lips or blues of the eye – pull in the opposite direction. Such elements resist easy definition and so the viewer is refused control over the subject. Instead, there is an allusion to hidden depths of character, of strength and resistance. Given the laden prison context, Underswim can be seen as a choreography of dissidence. The subtle nuance or dart of the eye reveals not truth, but the wider expanses of the soul in its refusal to submit to our own gaze. GM

Laura Gannon Acknowledgements

Woman in film
Carmel Seery,
Camera woman
Deidre Noonan,
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Lawrence O Hana.

Artist Biography

Laura Gannon, based in Dublin and Limerick, received a BA (Hons) in
Fine Art from the University of Ulster in Belfast in 1994. She attended the
Ecole Nationale des Beaux Arts Cergy Pontoise, Paris, France in 1993.
She participated in the Irish Museum of Modern Art's residency and
artists' work programme between 1996 and 1997. She was commissioned
in 1997 by the Sculptors' Society of Ireland for a Video Symposium and
has received awards from the Irish Arts Council's Macauley Fellowship
(1997) and Film and Video Award (1998). Laura has had solo exhibitions at
Temple Bar Gallery, Dublin (Work in Progress) in 2000 and in 1997 she
exhibited "The Spinning Room" at the Jo Rain Gallery, Dublin and "The
Blue Nerve" at the Context Gallery in Derry.
Her work was shown recently at the Med Film Festival in Rome, Italy and
the Static Gallery, Liverpool, U.K. (2000). She has exhibited in Irish group
exhibitions such as The Challenge of Power at Limerick City Municipal
Gallery and Thinking Drawing, at the Royal Hibernian Academy in 1998.
Her work is held in several Irish corporate and government department
collections.

APPENDIX
PILOT PROJECT
TIME TABLE
1997 – 2001

Placing Art
Structures and Processes to Support the Pilot Programme.

INTRODUCTION

In 1997 neither Sligo County Council or Sligo Corporation had a history of commissioning artists through the Department of the Environment and Local Government per cent for art scheme. The scheme offers many opportunities for artists, which in the main cannot be availed of due to a lack of policy, clear strategy and the necessary administrative support structures. A pilot approach to an inaugural programme of public art was essential to achieve the clarity and practical experience necessary to inform policy proposals, adopt a strategic approach and test administrative support structures. The chronological overview below describes the process and the structures put in place to support the pilot programme.

SEPTEMBER 1997

Sligo County Council and Sligo Corporation establish the **Public Art Working Group** to identify housing and infrastructural projects for application of the one per cent for art scheme 1997–2000.

OCTOBER/FEBRUARY 1997

The Public Art Working Group decides to proceed with six small-scale commissions, in selected locations and pooling of funds. Budgets are processed by relevant sections and confirmed by March 1997.

APRIL 1998

The Sligo local authorities advertise for artist submissions to establish the pilot **Creative Arts Panel**. The six small-scale artist commissions will be confined to this panel. The County Arts Office in conjunction with Sligo Leader Partnership Company Ltd. submit proposal to the Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation seeking funds to appoint a public art co-ordinator.

JULY 1998

Independent selectors meet in Sligo to select artists for the **Creative Arts Panel**. From a total of 50 submissions,12 artists are selected. Selectors: Arts Council nominee, Dr. Liam Kelly, University of Ulster, A.A.I. nominee, Sean Mc Sweeney, Artist, IMMA, Catherine Marshall, Curator of the Collection, Public Art Working, Group nominees x 2, Sean Martin, Senior Executive Architect, Sligo Corporation, Leland Bardwell, Poet.

SEPTEMBER 1998	**Artworking** Agency is contracted to advise the Public Art Working Group on the six **Placing Art** pilot project commissions.
FEBRUARY 1999	The **Creative Arts Panel** meets in Sligo for contextual briefing on the six project commissions followed by site visits. Amended proposal is submitted to the Special Support Programme for Peace & Reconciliation.
MARCH/APRIL 1999	Artists select projects and develop submissions for one or more. A fee is paid for submissions and a six-week time frame is allowed.
APRIL 1999	Dr. Liam Kelly, University of Ulster, selects project submissions in two stages concluding with interview.
MAY 1999	Funding is confirmed by the Special Support Programme for Peace & Reconciliation.
JUNE 1999	Artists are commissioned and commence a three-month research and development phase.
JULY 1999	Public Art Co-ordinator, Mary Mc Donagh takes up her appointment.
SEPTEMBER 1999	Public Art Management Committee meets for the first time. Their role is to support the Public Art Co-ordinator in the delivery of the pilot programme and to work with her to develop an evaluation methodology for the programme. Committee Members: Lissie Byrne, Art Department, Institute of Technology, Sligo, Anna Spearman, Community Arts Worker, County Sligo Leader Partnership Company Ltd., Vincent French, Community Representative (People's Purchase project), Mary Mc Auliffe, County Arts Officer, Sligo local authorities, Paul Wilson,

Community Representative (Keepsakes project), Camilla Smith, Community Support Worker, County Sligo Leader Partnership Company Ltd., John Mc Gettrick, Community Representative (A Metaphoric Portrait of Michael Coleman project).

Dr. Gavin Murphy, Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology, is commissioned to write the critical essay on the pilot programme and to document each of the six project commissions as case studies.

Alice Maher, artist, gives illustrated talk on public art to artists and community groups participating in the programme.

PROJECTS COMPLETED

Title	Artist	Commissioning Authority
Underswim	Laura Gannon	Sligo Corporation
Completion Date April 2000		
People's Purchase	Ronnie Hughes	Sligo Corporation
Completion Date May 2000		
Keepsakes	Ronnie Hughes	Sligo Co. Council
Completion Date June 2000		
Owning the Space	Imelda Peppard	Sligo Corporation
Completion Date September 2000		
Knoxpark Regeneration	Martina Coyle	Sligo Co. Council
	Hiliary Gilligan	
	Pauline O' Connell	
Completion Date October 2000		
Metaphoric Portrait of Michael Coleman	Ron van der Noll	Sligo Co. Council
Completion Date October 2000		

OCTOBER 2000

Presentation on **Placing Art** by the Sligo local authorities at the national conference, entitled '**Public Art-making it work**', organized by the National Sculpture Factory.

DECEMBER 2000

Two-day international colloquium organised by Sligo County Council and Sligo Corporation takes place in the Model Arts and Niland Gallery, Sligo. The colloquium focuses on public art in rural, coastal and small urban environments with presentations from artists, curators and writers from around the world.

JANUARY/JUNE 2001

Public Art Management Committee complete evaluation of the pilot. The final report on the programme is prepared for presentation to the members of Sligo County Council and Sligo Corporation.