



Report to Arts, Culture, Recreation and Community SPC

13th April 2015

Item No. 7

Participation in the Arts.

Statistical evidence in Ireland and abroad has clearly identified significant barriers to accessing mainstream arts such as gender, age, ability, cultural tradition, social class and economic accessibility.

People participate in the Arts in many different ways. The most common is as an audience member or visitor. Whether listening to music or going to a play, visiting a gallery, the Arts depend on support from the public and not just financially; the response of the audience or viewer, the experience of the reader, the appreciation of the listener are obviously central to the artists expression.

In responding to Kristina McElroy's invitation to address the broad area of Arts participation it is incumbent on me to pay tribute to her passionate engagement in the Arts as practitioner, advocate and teacher for more than thirty years. In responding I want to honour and include all areas of participatory practice and to endeavour to show the difference between them and the difference as well as the relationship between participatory and professional practice. Not least I wish to set out that participation in the Arts has changed and is changing constantly.

A professional opera singer. if they hold any hope of a sustainable career, will study for more years than an engineer or doctor and like their fellow professionals engage in constant professional development. This realisation, that the arts are a professional career was hard won in Ireland across all art forms and to this day some of our artists of highest standing find it very difficult to find support or regard for their work. It is important therefore at all times to understand the difference between participation and practice. Although every local rugby club is precious not every member wants to or will play professionally. At the same time there would not be a National team without the local, school, municipal, regional and national participation. The same is true for the Arts.

In the theatre, one of the most popular art forms in Ireland, the blurring of amateur, community, participatory and professional is constant but there are distinct differences in all of these activities. I want to make it very clear that I do not regard amateur and professional as value judgements i.e. amateur good professional bad etc. I will use the theatre as an example of an art form with many ways of engaging with the public but this approach can be applied roughly to all art forms

There are many amateur theatre companies in Ireland (hundreds in fact). They are a wonderful asset to their community. As we know they gather often around a small number of passionate theatre enthusiasts and put on plays for local enjoyment and competitions. Some of these productions rival professional standards (many do not) and traditionally actors who went on to professional careers cut their teeth here. The annual or biannual musical or play is usually strongly supported by friends and family. There is no strong overlap between this audience and the professional audience for let's say the Project Arts Centre or the Abbey. These groups may get professional advice or coaching but they mostly rely on their own talent and initiative.

Classes: many people attend drama classes on a part time basis. Many attend to build self confidence or out of curiosity and most importantly for self expression and to learn more 'From the inside' about an art form they are interested in. This may be a start to a professional career but rarely. There is a small cohort that has the talent and ability to secure full time training in colleges like The Lir or The Gaiety School of Acting. This cohort is intent on a professional career. What's common to drama classes is that whether full time or part time they are normally taught by a working professional. Here the student begins to appreciate the work required to be an artist, the talent they possess and the choice they have to make about how far they could go.

Workshops: as part of Youth Work/Older people's groups or community development

Here the primary focus is on bringing people together for an enjoyable experience and if the Arts and or Crafts can deliver this then it is chosen. A hunger may develop for deeper engagement but mostly coming together is the aim.

Outreach: This term usually refers to an arts organisations work outside its main professional programme such as school visits or talks for the public. It is term that has become slightly discredited in recent years as participation in the arts should not be seen as less valuable than practice but as having unique features and artistic outcomes of its own.

The Arts in Participation, Arts in Health, Socially Engaged Practice, Collaborative Arts Practice, and Arts In Education, Youth Arts, And Voluntary Arts.

These above seven terms are the modern definitions that Artists and Arts Organisations use to view the ways in which the public participate in The Arts. These are highly developed terms based on research and practice. What is important to remember is that it is not just participation, development or learning that is on offer here. Those involved also want an 'artistic outcome' that magical, innovative, creative leap of the imagination that brings everything together. Remember also that the art forms don't sit in their boxes comfortably anymore. There is Music in the Visual arts, Opera on the street, Theatre in convents, Artists in Facebook. In San Sebastian in 2016 thousands of citizens will form a human chain from the spot were the first casualty of ETA occurred to City Hall. The Arts are reflecting how everything is changing and they are changing also. These terms are also sometimes interchangeable.

The **Arts in Participation:** is a generic term describing all opportunities to engage in the Arts by those who are not artists or arts workers.

It normally does not refer to classes or training but to projects that involve a professional artist and a group or groups of people they are engaging with.

In 2004 the artists Rhona Byrne worked with the Pigeon Clubs of Ballymun and local residents to attach messages onto hundreds of pigeons to be released from the top of a tower block. These messages took the form of the wishes and hopes of the residents involved for the Regeneration. Rhona also organised a special 'pigeon auction, in the Arts Centre alongside an exhibition of photos of the project. An unforgettable night of pigeon fanciers and the Arts.

Arts in Health: Some artists specialise in the area of arts in health and I have witnessed remarkable work by Helium Arts in Temple Street where dialysis patients use the long waiting hours connected to a machine to write poetry or music with the support of a professional artist producing publications and visual pieces.

Socially Engaged Practice: Many artists work in communities that are economically educationally and or socially marginalised. It a challenging, difficult but very rewarding practice. I am heartened and inspired by artists such as Fiona Whelan in Rialto who has for some years worked with young people as a visual artist and her work exemplifies the value of empowerment, youth development and artistic excellence. Marie Brett's Amulet exhibition at the LAB is a powerful example of socially engaged practice. Working with bereavement midwives and women who had lost babies, Marie developed the body of work shown in the exhibition and the book Anamnesis. The work developed out of a long research phase to create work that exists as the artist describes it "on the pivot of risk and trust". There has been a huge response to this exhibition which deals with an issue so rarely discussed in Irish society

Youth Arts: While there are varied definitions of youth arts across many perspectives, the NYCI definition is that youth art

'can be broadly defined as young people taking part voluntarily in creative, cultural or expressive activity outside of the formal education process. It can encompass participation and appreciation, as well as engagement with arts work specifically created by with or for young people'.

Organisations supported by Dublin City Council, such as NAYD and DYT, act as a considerable resource to the development of this practice in specific art forms. Our youth arts partnership with CDYSB has worked across art-forms over a number of years, most recently completing a short film written by *What Richard Did* screenwriter Malcolm Campbell, where young people (drawn from youth projects across the city) worked together over a 4 month process, in preparation for a final shoot with professional film crew.

Collaborative Arts: Sarah Browne and Jesse Jones have been commissioned by Artangel, a London based internationally renowned public art commissioning agency. How did the female body come to be the focus of repressed histories and political desires under the regulation of the State?

In the Shadow of the State is a new project by artists Sarah Browne and Jesse Jones, marking their first collaboration together.

The artists will work in Ireland and the UK, expanding on existing networks of solidarity between women that often remain invisible or written out of the usual postcolonial narrative. The artists will take the role of shadow researchers, tracing the contours of existing non-institutional activist structures of support that enable women to navigate state repression against the female body, particularly related to reproductive rights..

The Irish Sea, the channel of water between the islands of Ireland and Great Britain, is a key territory for this projects both symbolically and physically. The ambition is to locate the work between the UK and Ireland. *In the Shadow of the State* will be realised in public form in both Ireland and the UK in 2016, coinciding with the centenary of the Easter Rising in the Republic of Ireland.

The current exhibition at the LAB involves collaboration with UCD Art in Science. Sheena Barrett, along with Emer O'Boyle from UCD, has curated an exhibition of artists who have collaborated with researchers from the UCD Science Department and organised a series of events to encourage future collaborations.

Arts in Education: The Arts in Education Charter (published, 2013) is a signed commitment from The Department of Art, Heritage and the Gaeltacht and The Department of Education and Skills. It defines arts-in-education practice and highlights areas for further development. A Higher Level Implementation Group has been appointed to implement the intentions of the Charter. The Implementation Group has identified the development of a National Arts-In-Education web-portal and National Arts-Rich-School Initiative as two strands for targeted development of this area of practice.

Artists have worked in school settings alongside teachers and their students over many years and research and debate on the place of the Arts in the educational curriculum has intensified recently. This new emphasis comes from what has been learned through scientific research on the effect of exposure to artistic processes and artists work on children that has been proven to be positive in every way from literacy to personal development. Arts-In-Education practice *involves skilled, professional artists of all disciplines working for and with schools in the making, receiving and interpreting of a wide range of arts experiences*. Arts-in-education practice can happen within or outside the school. It ranges from once off visits, through more extended programmes to intensive, collaborative projects. Artists, arts organisations, pupils, teachers and sometimes primary carers, work together to create arts experiences that enrich the curriculum and support the core educational mission of the school. Arts-in-education practice enriches the lives of all involved, particularly nurturing the developing minds and imaginations of the pupils.

Dublin City Arts Office has a long history of working with schools across its programme strands such as direct funding through neighbourhood and revenue funding, artists in residence, Drama in Schools Programme, Children's Art in Libraries and the Artists' Panel. The Arts Office is currently supporting Project 20/20, a Visual Literacy Initiative with Children in Dublin 1 and The LAB Gallery that is a focused action-research piece of work into contemporary art and children living in Dublin 1.

The project involves local children – Montessori, Primary School u12s; educators, schools, parents / local families inclusive of diverse communities, artists, local community agencies.

It connects in this project with key associate partners - for example, Dublin City Council/Public Art and Children's Art in Libraries Programme; The Ark; Marino Institute of Education - with the purpose of broadening audience development and opportunities for children, schools and families and their experience of contemporary art in the city. Dublin City Artists' Panel has been invited by the National Arts in Education Portal/Kidsown (Funded by the Department of Education and Skills) to partner with Dublin City Arts Office and five artists on the panel to begin an online discussion about The Artists'-Schools Guidelines (published 2006), reflective practice and the purpose of documenting arts in education practice.

Voluntary Arts

A new and growing area where the public often through social media and the creation of major community cultural events support the access to and artistic expression of non artists or those not engaging with artistic organisations. This is potentially a great growth area for artists and new audiences for the arts as it harnesses many of the links that community organisations have and can reach places that perhaps arts organisations or Local Authorities cannot. Voluntary Arts the organisation is UK based and very active in Northern Ireland but making strides now in the Republic. Dublin City Council has work to do to begin to engage this approach.

As always there are challenges and nettles to grasp in all of these ways to participate in the arts not least of which are the standard of artistic work we want our citizens to enjoy. And also that people can feel alienated from professional arts practice for a variety of reasons to which there is not always an easy answer. The Arts can be challenging and disruptive and not always accessible. Equally there can often be attempts to 'dumb down' the arts simply to be inclusive and these attempts rarely inspire anyone. The City Arts Office navigates and mediates these viewpoints and seeks to unify what are essentially complementary agendas in projects, programmes and policy.

I am very proud that in every example I have set out (apart notably from Voluntary Arts) that Dublin City Council are/were a central component according to the appropriate role such as funder (Rhona Byrne) Curator (the Lab) Broker/Programmer (CDYSB) and so on. The City Arts Office is often invisible in this work and that is as it should be at times as the participant and the public are the focus. The Arts Office shares this approach with all of our colleagues and many great arts in participation projects occur in Libraries, The Hugh Lane, and Sports Section and in Parks.

When the new Public Participation Networks are established (PPN) in Dublin City the Arts Office will be happy to engage with this and any Arts Group attached to it. I suggest that the Arts Office meet with the existing group on a quarterly basis and that we also work closely with the Community Section to make sure that we are responding at local level at all times.

**Ray Yeates,
City Arts Officer**