



Stormy Petrel/Guairdeall

by Orla Ryan, Alanna O'Kelly, Brian Hand

Acknowledgments

Stormy Petrel/ Guairdeall Orla Ryan, Alanna O'Kelly and Brian Hand
Hanoi, 27 May – 27 June 2016

The Vietnamese Women's Museum exhibition curated by Pham Phuong Cuc

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Foreword by Ambassador Cáit Moran

I am delighted to welcome the Irish Exhibition, Stormy Petrel, to Hanoi. The exhibition is part of a programme of events to celebrate 20 years of diplomatic relations between Ireland and Vietnam which we hope will strengthen further the friendship between our peoples.

The Stormy Petrel give us a layered artistic and literary medium in which to reflect on the often overlooked role of women in revolution and political endeavour.

This year marks the centenary of the 1916 Easter Rising, a revolt by a small group of Irish anti-colonialists who took up arms against the British Empire in pursuit of independence for Ireland. The Rising was militarily unsuccessful but it was a seismic moment on Ireland's path to independence.

The marking of the centenary in Ireland has offered an opportunity for reflection on the impetus of the rebellion, the role of those who took part, and those who opposed it.

We remember those who died in the revolt - both rebel and British Crown forces, and the 374 civilians who were killed - 40 of whom were children.

It has allowed us to reflect on the diverse and complex origins of our nation. It has prompted a conversation on the visionary values of equality and respect which were espoused by the leaders of the Rising in their Proclamation of an Irish Republic as well as some self-reflection on how we have lived up to those values and whether they have stood the test of time.

For many years, the role played by women in the Rising was overlooked. The 100 year commemoration has righted this by recognising the powerful role played by Irish women during this period. In the early 20th century, the Stormy Petrel bird was an international symbol of revolution and anti-colonial sentiment. In recalling this symbol, the exhibition looks at the role of women couriers, or 'human telegraphs', in the 1916 uprising.

The early part of the 20th century in Ireland, from which the 1916 rebellion sprung, was a period of cultural and literary awakening in Ireland. This renaissance forged a new and distinctive Irish culture which was a central element of the Rising, and a source of inspiration for many of those who took part.

Through the Stormy Petrel, we celebrate not only our rich cultural heritage, but also its contemporary expression, and the creative way in which it allows us to tell a story.

I thank and applaud Orla Ryan, Brian Hand and Alanna O'Kelly for the creativity of their work and Phạm Phương Cúc at CUC Gallery and Vietnam Women's Museum for their thoughtful curation and generous hosting of the exhibition.

We hope that the exhibition will inspire rich conversations about the role of Irish and Vietnamese women in political and cultural life.

Cáit Moran

Ambassador of Ireland to the Socialist Republic of Vietnam

REVOLUTIONARY WOMAN Kathleen

IN USE 100 Y

Portrait of a Rebel Father

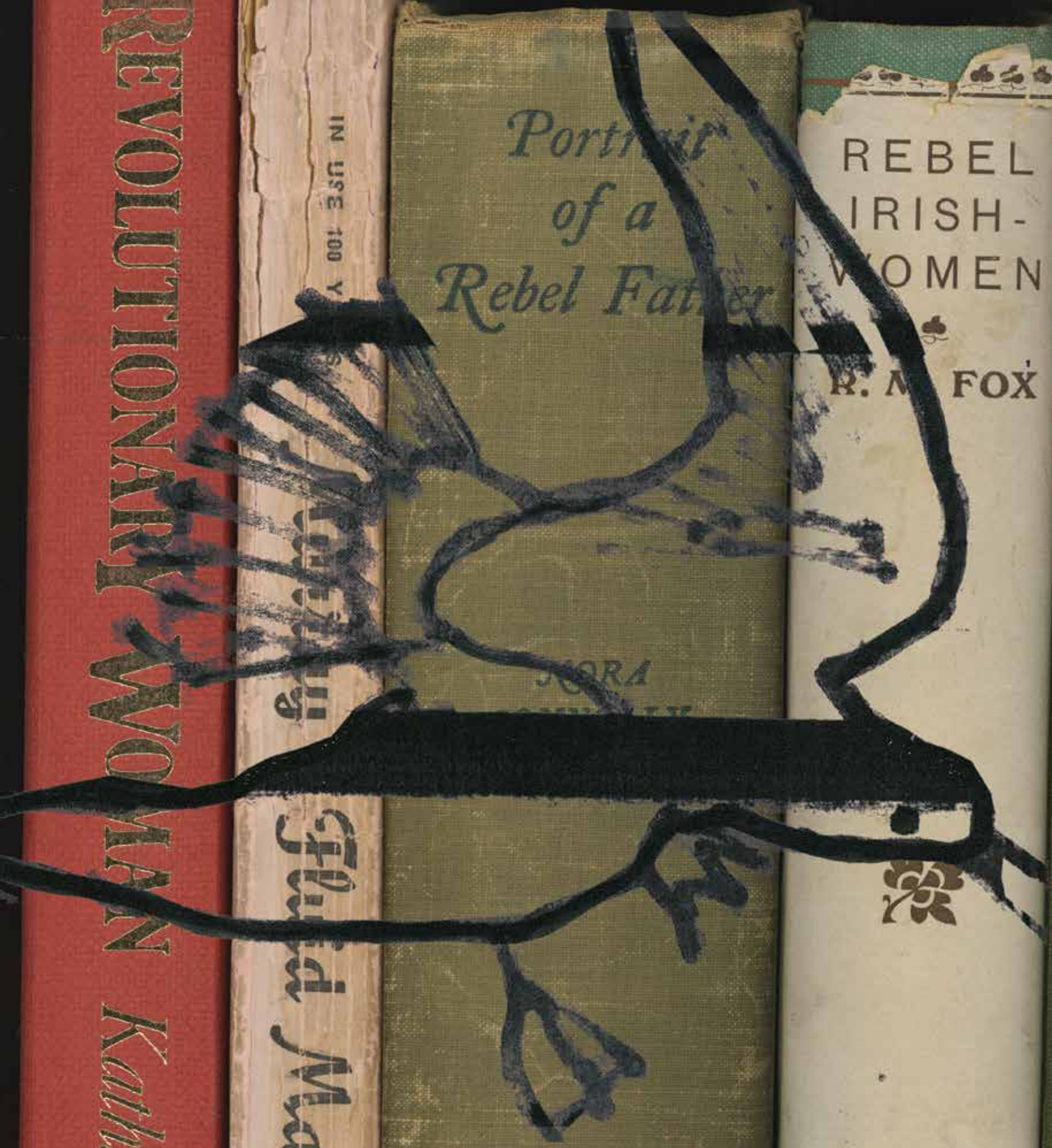
REBEL IRISH-WOMEN

R. M. FOX

THE SINN FEIN REBELLION AS I SAW IT

MRS. SAMUEL NORWAY

St. Paul Magr



Stormy Petrel Introduction by Orla Ryan

This exhibition of sound and images explores women and their role in Irish history before the formation of the Irish State. In this centenary year we wanted to make art about a forgotten part of Irish women's history especially their role in the revolt against British power in Ireland in 1916. This revolt called the Easter Rising of 1916 was a watershed in Irish and British imperial history. Although planned to take advantage of the fact that Britain's attention was directed towards the First World War, the Irish rebellion almost didn't happen, it was almost a non event. The original rebellion was to be nationwide on Easter Sunday but was cancelled at the eleventh hour by the majority faction of the revolutionary nationalist leadership creating confusion within the rebel movement. On the close of Easter Sunday army and police intelligence felt the suspected storm had collapsed, that once again the disaffected conspirators were all talk and incapable of taking action. Yet despite such set-backs, a small determined force of separatists, republicans, labour activists, anti-conscriptionists and feminists had regrouped and re-committed to violent action. In doing this the rebel leaders were aware of similar independence movements globally like those in Mexico, Barcelona, Cuba, the Philippines and indeed anti colonial rebellions in Singapore or the Cochinchina revolt of 1916.

On the holiday morning of Easter Monday, when many in Dublin were planning a day at the races, they proceeded to occupy prominent buildings in the city centre and set up street barricades to defend their position against her Majesty's army. They immediately broadcast to the world from the General Post Office, which had become the headquarters for rebel command, that a free Irish Republic had been declared with equal rights for men and women. They also sent over 30 women couriers around the country to try and rise other towns and cities. The shock revolt lasted a week. At the end, Dublin lay in ruins. The British Government's immediate response instructed the military in charge to impose martial law across the island and deal severely with all those involved, there were mass arrests and then executions of the leaders by firing squad. In a short time there was a sea change in popular opinion about the ill-fated rebellion. All of this was not entirely unpredictable, the assorted leaders of the rebellion knew there were embers of support within the country for ending the long colonial rule of Britain in Ireland. They had seen in their motley ranks young educated revolutionaries, men and women with a modern vision for changing the conservative bourgeois colonial society. And finally the revolutionary leadership knew the power of symbolism and iconography, many were poets, dramatists and artists. Their deaths and prison sentences transformed an inchoate rebellion into a heroic image of sacrifice and patriotism. It reverberated around the British Empire. Liberation movements around a rapidly shrinking globe observed with a new resolve.

While researching the forgotten history of the revolutionary women couriers of 1916 in Ireland we realised and developed the associative links between the forgotten metaphor of the stormy petrel seabird. Our research delved into the metaphor of the stormy petrel and the folklore associated with

the world's smallest sea bird now more commonly known as the storm petrel. In the 19th century the symbolism attached to this little bird is of a radical revolutionary, heroic in the face of extreme danger and an 'announcer of the storm'. Like the bird announcing the storm, the women couriers we looked at were also bringing news of the revolt. In 1901 Maxim Gorky wrote the poem 'Song of The Stormy Petrel', which would later become part of the Soviet school curriculum. The European storm petrel (*hydrobatidae pelagicus*) weighs just 25 grammes and lives for up to 30 years. With pitch black plumage and a dash of white, it is an amazing survivor, a cosmopolitan traveller, a scavenger of scraps adapted to living on the wild oceans. Only coming to land for the nesting season, it is also distinctive as an erratic, fast-flying, nocturnal hunter, and these features have caused some of its fascination and dread for sailors, migrants and maritime communities. The stormy petrel has a mysterious piercing cry and a hiccupping machinic call. The bird often takes shelter on the leeward side of vessels and in more superstitious times, literally haunted the crew. In fishing folklore, this bat-like little bird becomes a warning bird and a bad omen. Before modern technology, the momentary appearance of the Stormy Petrel supported the prediction that difficult waters were not far off.

One of the Irish words for the Storm Petrel bird, *Guairdeall* has many meanings in the Irish language. Besides meaning the Storm Petrel it can also mean to hover, to encircle, to loiter and as artists, we liked how these meanings created a poetic connection with the women couriers and their role. *Thug siad oíche ar guairdeall dom* – the Irish for 'they left me wandering all night' – fitted perfectly with our research into women couriers during the Easter Rising. Witness statements and pension records of these women who were sent out on Easter Monday morning to try to rise the Volunteer organisation through IRB contacts became a central part of our project. Many of these women were among the first to be shown the Proclamation which was the Declaration of the new Republic.

This Proclamation printed in secret and without access to all the typeset needed was made in a hurry and in secrecy. While historically it is now a very important Irish document its emergence is related to a type of illegal guerilla publishing which was called by the British authorities at the time 'The Mosquito Press'. These cheap, short-lived papers were published in samizdat fashion and had great titles such as *Honesty*, *Forward*, *Scissors and Paste*, *The Spark*, *Nationality*, *Workers' Republic*, *The Harp* and many more. As each press was shut down, new ones emerged to fill the gap. The tone of these sheets became more anti-authoritarian, seditious and humorous as the clampdown progressed. Also avidly read in Dublin at that time was *The New Age*, to which the rebel leader of the Citizen's Army James Connolly contributed and which Pablo Picasso included in his famous high cubist painting on paper, *Bottles and Glasses*, 1911. With the destruction of 1916, the energy and enquiry of this tradition would be silenced.

The women in their statements recall how they were asked to memorise the Proclamation. These

women became human telegraphs, on the go every minute, the pressure of the despatch always on them. Leaving the city on trains was hard emotionally, returning for some proved homeric. Their message was a hand-written note from rebel leaders Padraig Pearse and James Connolly, 'we rise at noon, obey your orders signed etc' and it had to be hidden in clothing or hair. If discovered, this scrap of paper was to be eaten or destroyed. There is a link here to some of the permanent exhibits in The Women's Museum for example Le Thi Anh's scarf used for carrying secret orders or the jewellery box used to conceal documents by Khuu Thi Hong, and the flower vase of Vo Thi Cung. What allows these women to be valuable as couriers is their ability to hide behind the normal practices of everyday life and yet unfortunately in the Irish context it is this very ability which also saw them written out of the official narrative for so long.

We found that the various missions break down into three chapters, departure on trains, delivery of the cipher and ensuing unsuccessful arguments, and finally return through improvised modes of transport or just wearily on foot at night. This male IRB leadership would go a long way to cover up what was in essence disobedience and insubordination of an official order from their commanders. Few witness statements from key male actors even mention the delivery of this command or the presence of women couriers.

Our research into all of these agents revealed fascinating accounts of trying to return to Dublin, the capital, to complete their mission and deliver news of their inability to convince the organisation of the rebel leader's order to attack. But since the rebellion had started, getting back to Dublin was not straightforward; trains had stopped and police detectives were on full alert. Couriers resorted to all sorts of ingenuity and bravery in attempting the challenge to reach Dublin. The fastest agent was Elizabeth O'Farrell, who left Dublin early on Easter Monday for the west of the country, but through sheer luck made it back to the GPO before 11pm on Monday night. The longest was Nora Thornton who arrived back in Dublin more than 10 days later as she had to be hidden to evade arrest.

As we plotted the journeys and studied the words from statements and pension interviews we tried to condense aspects of their narrative accounts that spoke to us, trying to capture their subjectivities, their turn of phrase and sensibilities, while at the same time thinking about representation of these through some of the strategies of anarcho-syndicalist, modernist aesthetics of 1916. These fragmented narratives are part of the sound installation.

Another creative impulse in our artistic research was to think about popular culture and to imagine the women's relationship to it at that time. Action-adventure narratives targeting a female readership were very popular in the teens of the 20th century, as were serial-queen melodrama films.

What is interesting from our point of view in relation to these action-adventures is the active role of the female character. Her lack of passivity is striking. As Ben Singer and others have pointed out, they are a vernacular index of the radical re-orientation of how 'womanhood' is understood and negotiated at this time. These films as popular entertainment can be understood as both reflecting societal shifts and as wish-fulfillment for a female audience of a newly emerging emancipation that is contested, fragile and incomplete. Books and films such as *What Happened to Mary*, *The Hazards of Helin*, *The Romance of Elaine*, *The Perils of Pauline* and the French serial *The Vampires* all present scenes of women's courageous physical daring on trains, planes and automobiles, far removed from the domestic space associated with female physical passivity and decorum. These action-adventure heroines are physically resilient and court danger. The inter-textual links between these popular representations and the accounts given by the women couriers is fascinating. The cloak-and-dagger edginess of crime and mystery drama is evident in references to 'cryptic knocks' and 'cryptic postcards' and of how the women talk about moving ammunition 'under the noses' of the detectives. Yan Shan Shan, considered the first Chinese film actress with her role in the 1914 film *Zhuang Zi Tests his Wife*, also took part in the Republican Revolution of 1911.

Examining the pension interviews and documentation of these women in the military archives helped us build a collage of the events of Easter Week. Darkness, low cloud and fog allow the couriers to slip past the cordon. One military lawyer announces: 'You were singularly unsuccessful were you not?' And yet these women lived to tell their stories: bear in mind that 27 million people died from flu in 1914 and Dublin would be full of widows by the end of the First World War. Thousands of Vietnamese conscripts also lost their lives in the Battle of the Somme and Picardy in France that Summer. A value for life, equality and social justice is a strong sentiment from these women's testimonies.



Augustine O'Donoghue and Lucy Rowland in performance "Mother Operated on Successfully Today" GPO, Dublin.
Photo credit: Ros Kavanagh

I would remain

he would prefer

back and look after

let me out a side street,

to go

barricades

tears and so were mine.

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be caught on you;

be found on you,

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message

time

Dublin .

Orla Ryan

Orla Ryan is an artist, curator, writer and lecturer. She has organized three exhibitions of Vietnamese artists in Ireland at The Void Gallery, Dinh Q Lê's new film commission *The Colony* made with Artangel and the Ikon Gallery (May - July 2016) and a large group exhibition *Spring Watching Pavilion* (September - October 2015) and *Trinh T. Minha* (2008)

Ryan is a member of the Stormy Petrel Group with Alanna O' Kelly and Brian Hand. She has worked on another art work with Brian Hand called *Entre Chien et Loup* and this work appears in Sarah Browne's publication *Between a Dog and a Wolf* (2015) and the CCA's *Our Neighbourhood*, a participatory Public Art Project also curated by Sarah Browne. She studied at St. Martins School of Art, London (BA Hons); NCAD, Dublin (BA Hons); The Whitney Museum Independent Study Program, New York; Dublin City University (MA 1998 and PhD 2005). She currently lectures in the Wexford Campus School of Art and Design IT Carlow. She was the Co-editor with Maeve Connolly of *The Glass Eye* (2000) an artists book about artists and television. She has organized a number of artists exhibitions at the Void Gallery in Derry including *Candice Breitz* (with Maoliosa Boyle (2013); *Ursula Biemann* (2008); *Mairead McClean* (2007); *Denis McNulty* (2006).

Her art work has been exhibited internationally: *The Downtown Art Festival*, New York; *Rear Window*, London; *Galerie 50/20*, Salzburg; *Transmission Gallery*, Glasgow; *CCA*, Glasgow; Art projects also appear in *Inter Asia Cultural Studies* (vol 14 2013), *Je Veux* (2003), *Charley 1* (2002).
Visit <http://orlaryan.net/>

Alanna O’Kelly

Alanna O Kelly (1955) is one of Ireland’s most significant artists. She lives and works in south Wexford. Alanna is a visual artist, best known for her performance video and sound installations. She has achieved critical acclaim and international exposure for her solo shows and installations, including the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin; Museum of Art, Gave, Sweden; Academie des Beaux Arts, Paris; The Centre George Pompidou, Paris; The Walker Gallery, Liverpool; The Institute of Contemporary Art, London, etc. In addition O’Kelly has represented Ireland in Documenta 8, Kassel, Germany, and the Sao Paulo Biennale, Brazil.

In terms of group exhibitions her work has travelled to many of the major cities in Europe, many parts of the U.S.A. Canada and China, and has been included in many representational shows from Ireland. In her career to date O’Kelly has had solo exhibitions and group shows all over Ireland. She has won the prestigious IMMA Glen Dimplex Artists Award, and The Ernie O’ Malley award for artistic achievement.

O’Kelly’s art practice has been analyzed and critically reviewed in the major international art journals Third Text, Circa, Contemporania, and Art Forum International. Her work has appeared on Irish TV and Radio. Images of her work have been included in and featured on the cover of many major publications, including From The Poetic to the Political(1999); Irish Womens’ Poetry ed. Eavan Boland; Irish Journal of Feminist Studies; Irish Art Now; The Fifth Province (1991); Contemporary Art from Ireland; Visualise Carlow(2003-2004) etc. O’Kelly’s work has been the subject of PhD research at Gradcam and there are several BA and MA theses addressing her unique practice. She is an elected member of Aosdana.

Finally her video installation work has recently been purchased by Quinnipiac University’s Irish Famine Museum, Conneticut, U.S.A. where she is featured in their catalogue (2012). It is also very fitting to have her work included in the recent book The Atlas of The Great Irish Famine (2013) and the recent publication Performance art in Ireland:a history,(2015) as well as featuring on the cover of the prestigious book Art and Architecture of Ireland 1600 (2014) years of Irish art and architecture in five volumes.

Brian Hand

Brian Hand studied at NCAD and the Slade School of Art, London. Based in Co Carlow, he has exhibited widely both nationally and internationally most recently in group shows at The Void Derry and the ICA Philadelphia USA. As a writer Hand has published essays for artists such as Anne Tallentire, Noel Sheridan, Daphne Wright, Dennis McNulty, Colin Darke, and Dorothy Cross. Hand's most recent writing has appeared in essays commissioned for Creative Ireland, The Abbey Theatre, IMMA's What is... series and a new publication on the material history of the 1916 Rising. Large scale temporary public art works include The Car Called The Manager (2001) and Little War (2008). Hand was a founding member of collaborative art groups: Blue Funk, The Fire Dept.,147, Entre Chien et Loup and Stormy Petrel/ Guairdeall. From 1990-94 Hand worked on creating the Famine Museum at Strokestown, Co. Roscommon. Awards of note in his career include the PS1 International Studio Award in 1995 and the critical writing bursary from the Arts Council in 1999. In 2003, Hand was selected as curator of the Arts Council's Critical Voices programme. Hand is a lecturer in art and design at the Wexford Campus School of Art and Design.



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