

# Spark Creative Residency

Participating artists 2013 & 2014 *Jo Holmwood*

*A joint initiative of Leitrim County Arts Office and Leitrim Local Enterprise Office, SPARK is an artists' residency programme, funded by the Arts Council, which is aimed at artists who are interested in working in new environments and companies who are interested in collaborating with artists and promoting creativity within their organisations. As part of Spark, artists take on the dual roles of artist and creative collaborator spending an average of two days per week with a company over the course of six months, developing a programme of work which contains distinct benefits for both the artist and the company.*

*Here the four artists participating in the programme in 2013 and 2014 give an overview of their work*

## **Monica Corish** *Leitrim Observer*



As a writer, the idea of working in a business steeped in words intrigued me. As someone who had once worked in a global office

and travelled the world, the possibility of re-engaging with a busy workplace was exhilarating. In April 2014, after a two-hour site visit to the offices of the *Observer*, I had ideas for three poems already simmering in my notebook, and a reasonable confidence that I could write a poem a week in response to the stories in the paper.

And so it came to pass. Once a week I drive from Kinlough to

Carrick-on-Shannon. I make a cup of tea, pick up the latest edition, immerse myself. I search for an image or word or story that tugs at my attention. I write for two or three hours. I wander down to the staff canteen and chat, listen for what news is bubbling in the county.

With the editor or one of her reporters I proofread my latest offering, discuss layout. I am grateful for their patience with my line-and stanza-break obsessions. I may never know who reads these poems of Leitrim life. Like any parent with a child, all I can do is polish and preen their feathers and let go.

During my lunch break I swim. In the afternoon I email other writers and writing groups in the county, inviting contributions to the monthly Writing Leitrim page; or I trail behind the reporters, a rookie poet-reporter pursuing story trails and poem bothrins. My day's work done, I drive home past the windmills above Arigna, counting haiku syllables on my fingertips.

## **Niamh O'Connor** *Leitrim Association of People with Disabilities (LAPWD)*



LAPWD is a community led non-profit organisation that enables people with physical and

sensory disabilities in Co Leitrim to live independently in their own homes and communities. It comes from the philosophy of independent living, enabling equal participation and inclusion in society. It does this through the personal assistant service, accessible transport, social and recreational events and training courses and free disability information and guidance from their base at the Action Ability Centre in Mohill.

My focus throughout was the interface between the organisation and the public and so I began by (re)examining public documents, and finished up with our participation and intervention at Agricultural Shows in Jamestown, Manorhamilton, Ballinamore and Mohill in the summer of 2014. In all of this my aim was to act as a catalyst for creative reinterpretations of the business, with an emphasis on exploring the social value of the service within the wider community context.

Out of the residency came a number of diverse outputs—a film called 'soft landings', collaborative sculptures that explore free and compressed time, a drama group who struggled with Beckett and an assessment plan for 'social return on investment'—an outcomes based evaluation of LAPWD's services. Working as I do, as a socially oriented artist I tend to invite multiple aesthetics within the work so, for example, I brought in a wood turner (Niall



■ 4 way tug-of-war at Mohill show

Miller) and rope maker (Steffi Otto) to collaborate with me, to produce a set of rope games (4 way tug of war, quoits etc.) that were made during our visits to the agri. shows. The accompanying self-published rulebook advises the user to defer to local rules i.e. to make them up... Thanks to all my collaborators and especially to the staff and board of LAPWD.

**Padraig Cunningham**

*The Hive*

On the initial Spark site visit



manager of *The Hive*, Colm used a variety of scientific terms to describe its ethos. Words such as laboratory, incubation

units and experiment cropped up in conversation. Scientific metaphors are commonly incorporated into business as a term of reference and widely are assimilated into popular culture. The most obvious instance being the idea of the internet as a web or type of ecosystem. The contemporary use of this type of language has evolved from cybernetics, the science of looking at the world as a series of systems. Norbert Wiener, the grandfather of cybernetics defined it in 1948 as “the scientific study of control and communication in the animal and

the machine.” (*From Cybernetics, or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine, Cambridge, MIT Press*).

As a precursor to cybernetics and the use of biological metaphors I am researching Jakob von Uexkull, an Estonian biologist who was particularly interested in animal behaviour studies. Through his laboratory work he developed a (bio)philosophy that was somewhat at odds with Darwinism. He proposes that each organism has its own unique, phenomenal world (‘Umwelt’) that embraces each individual, like a “soap bubble”. He expands on this metaphor with biological case studies and describes the overlapping experiences as a sort of mesh. These ideas have a direct link with current thoughts on artificial intelligence and ideas that computers create their own world. It is here I find a connection with *The Hive* and its implementation of new technology and in particular the automated system controlling *The Hive’s* heating and lighting. Speculatively it could be said that *The Hive* is creating its own *Umwelt* through its gathering of information and controlling elements of the building’s function.

So far most of my time on the Spark residency has been about research, making notes and the like. It is a fantastic programme that allows you that time that is so often a premium. From now on I hope to engage more with the

business within ‘*The Hive*’ and start making, playing and creating a series of works within the building that reflect *The Hive’s* ethos for experimentation.

**Monica Flynn**

*The Café Society*

The history of cafés sparked a lot of



ideas initially, particularly Parisian cafés, as public spaces where artists, writers and philosophers gathered. I had

previously been involved in a project called *Food for Thought*, which focused on food sovereignty, so looking at the politics and economics of coffee production and public space was of initial interest. *Café Lounge* owner Georgia Visnyei is quite passionate about coffee, the particulars of its production and its history, so I also imagined capturing that in some way. The café struck me as a sort of in between space—neither work nor home—where commerce, publicness and cultural debate intersect. I wanted to harness notions of the Public Sphere and economics in a way that would appeal to the Café audience. Initial encounters included creating a philosophy and economics library in the café and reading philosophy texts with other local artists. But the primary aim was to test the appetite for public debate, inviting speakers from academia, the media and the arts.

I used the first event to ‘set the scene’, while creating a sense of conviviality and a context for future events. I invited local artist—publisher Mari-Aymone Djeribi, publishing historian Dr Maire

Kennedy and storyteller Fiona Dowling to contribute. Collectively they introduced cafés as part of an early Public Sphere, with an examination of their history in Europe and connections with publishing, commerce and literature. Focusing specifically on the Public Sphere, the second event 'Café Philosophie' was pivotal in the series. Dr Maeve Cooke discussed Jürgen Habermas's notions of 'Communicative Freedom/Reason', while Niall Crowley reflected on ways to counter modern-day Ire-

land's 'low-energy democracy' discussing the 'Claiming our Future' initiative which aims to develop consensus on what kind of society we do want. The audience got involved and there was genuine interest in the need for change, more robust debate in public life and a different kind of citizenship.

This opportunity really allowed me to push myself and my practice, as I was able to devote an extended amount of time to one

idea. In some ways, the open-ended nature of the discussions was a leap of faith, with the experience and response of the audience underpinning the effectiveness of the project. I come away from this residency with greater trust in my process and confidence in my ability to enthuse others and to bring theoretical concerns into a tangible and engaging form.\*

*\*This is an extract from an interview with Joanna Laws for the Visual Artists Ireland News Sheet (Sept 2014).*

SNIPPET



## Sheemore climb in aid of the Jack & Jill Foundation

On September 27th, 2014 hundreds of people walked up Sheemore Hill raising €10,000 which provides nursing care and support for children with severe neurological development issues, as well as offering some respite to the parents and families.

