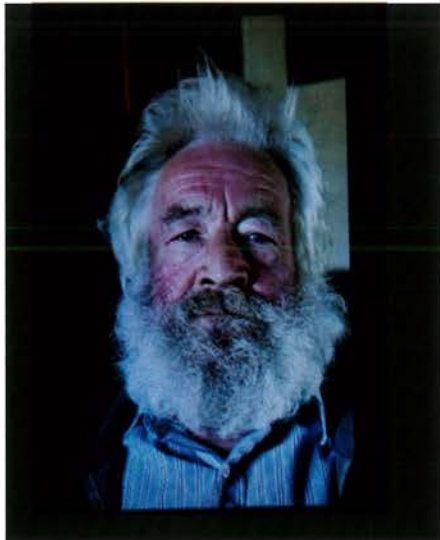


“ONCE I WAS A CHILD”

Johnnie Lawson, Artist, exhibits at Leitrim Sculpture Centre

Bláithín Gallagher

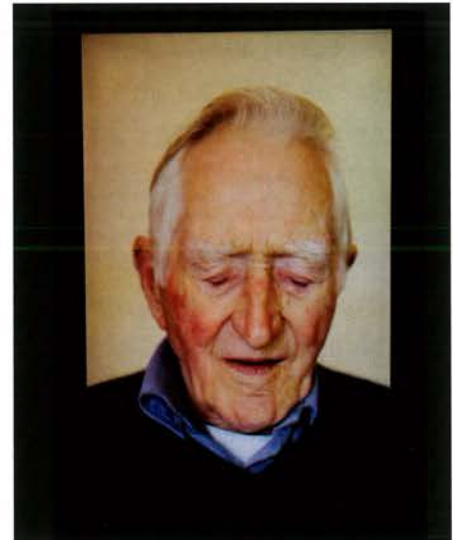
ON FRIDAY Oct 14th 2011 Johnnie Lawson, Artist in Residence at the Leitrim Sculpture Centre, Manorhamilton, launched an exhibition of his work, created during his residency at the centre. This evocative exhibition, opened by Mr Brendan Harvey, Leitrim Guardian Person of the Year 2011, generated a great reaction from those in attendance. Lawson presented evocative video portraits in a darkened meditative space, offering an intimate



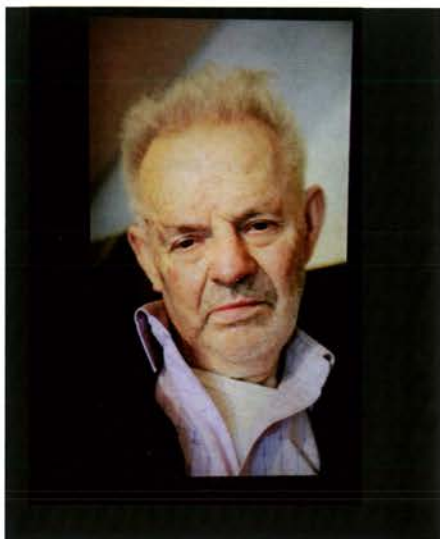
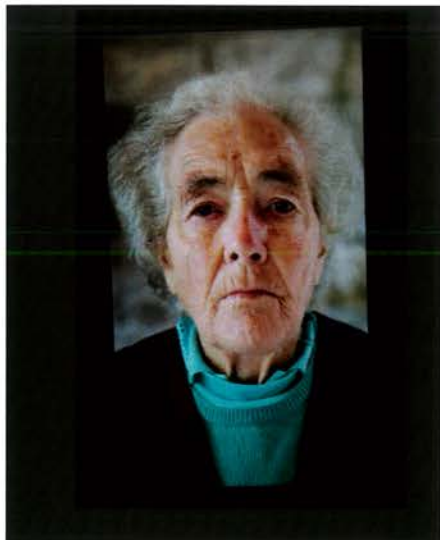
experience between the viewer and the work. A captivating ambient soundscape permeated the gallery.

A high tea reception took place in the style of a community hall fete. Tables filled with a cornucopia of home made produce from traditional recipes, a colourful and appetising display of scones, apple cakes, apple tarts, and pastries of all shapes and sizes adorned the tables, home made butters and jams completed the age old ambiance. Participants viewed the artworks at their leisure and than sat and chatted with other visitors over a cup of tea while enjoying the food available. A lovely convivial atmosphere prevailed, nobody seemed in a hurry to leave.

According to Richard Cavaliero, Operations and Financial Manager at the Leitrim Sculpture Centre, the



opening of Johnnie Lawson's exhibition attracted a record number of people. Several regular visitors to exhibitions to the centre felt that this one was the best they had seen, claiming it to be the most engaging. Some of the comments from those attending included: "It is the best show I've seen here. You can almost feel what these people are thinking by just looking at their eyes."; "Excellent idea, you can see emotions in people's faces"; "Very compelling, very different for the sculpture centre."; "Very powerful, very strong, very moving, very emotional. I felt moved to the core of my being. I think it is



amazing what has been captured."

Lawson chose to work with people from within his own community who would have been children in the 1920's and 1930's. He worked alongside, met, listened, and expanded his practice through their generous support, friendship and openness. In this exhibition the artist presented a sense of the personal childhood memories and recollections of his sitters and brought them into an art context in a unique manner. Lawson states that he spent much time in the company of these wonderful people, all senior citizens, over a period of several months. "I gathered vast amounts of footage during endless hours in cosy kitchens, countless warm cups of tea in hand, sitting comfortable in soft arm chairs with blazing fires by my feet, listening to treasured memories often imparted with passion, sadness, joy, pain and longing, but seldom regret."

Sean O'Reilly, Director of the Leitrim Sculpture Centre congratulated the artist and stated that Johnnie Lawson has delivered a very poignant and powerful expression within the show. O'Reilly went on to say "The exhibition itself is a testament to the value of working closely with others, of listening and being still and how such encounters can lead to the generation of new work and a sense of co-production and collaboration involving both the artist and the members of the public...In trying to capture the memories of these times, Johnnie relies not so much on spoken dialogue as on the emotional

effects and subtle presence of his subjects as they reflect on their past lives." In viewing this work, the gestures and expressions of the subjects tell the story and evoke through time,



rather than through static statements, the memory of past lives whilst the audience are invited to share this intimate space and so reflect on their own sense of time, of memory, of time past and time future. O'Reilly says "What is particularly strong about the exhibition is how Johnnie has allowed the experiences of his own research and exchange with his chosen participants to dictate the form and design of the exhibition."

Brendan Harvey, *Leitrim Guardian Person of the Year*, was very impressed with the exhibition. "I can only say that I am in awe and admiration of Johnnie for the very creative and imaginative way he has encouraged some of our senior citizens to sit down with their

thoughts, to contemplate, to reflect and to bring out their emotions from their earliest years. He was able to put at ease those who worked with him on this project, to sit with thoughts and memories of their childhood, and allow the feelings and emotions attached to those memories be freely expressed and recorded for this evocative body of work. I cannot say that I know other work that has captured this in the way Johnnie has done. He is to be congratulated. It is a very special talent to be able to do that."

Lawson states of his work "This method of not being present when my camera is recording, affords these people the privacy and freedom to

meditate about their childhood at their own pace. I believe this unveils an honest confrontation with each memory, subsequently revealed through facial expressions, and captured by my camera in its role as a seemingly indifferent observer. The exposure of such honest emotions as attached to memory is extremely difficult to capture by other means."

A heartfelt thanks was expressed by the artist, Johnnie Lawson to all the participants in the art project, for their kindness, honesty, openness and bravery in helping him realise this show. The artist is looking for other venues to host this exhibition.

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Long Time No See Dermot Healy



The Pig Executive, the Glens Centre Writer's group, facilitated by Dermot Healy, former writer in residence launched Dermot's most recent publication *Long Time No See* by performing extracts from the book

PHOTOS: JAMES MOLLOY



Dermot Healy signs his book for Anna Legge



Dermot Healy chats to Anna Gallagher Mohill



Dermot Healy & Donal Kelly