New Sites—New Fields

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New sites—New Fields is an experimental project set up at Leitrim Sculpture Centre, Manorhamilton to investigate the changing ways landscape and environments are transformed historically and in the present. 'New Sites–New Fields' is supported by Leitrim County Council and the Arts Council.

I am one of the six local artists to have been involved in this project since the beginning in June 2007. My personal research examined industrial heritage with a particular focus on the energy related industries of the Arigna area. Within a small radius one may find the Arigna Coal Mines, the site of the former ESB power station and a wind-farm. All three industries work towards the same aim—the production of energy. The presence of these features demonstrates that, similar to the way energy changes from one form to another, so too do the means of its production.

In my research I encountered a video production 'Arigna Power Station 1958-1993...' by local man Noel Mc Partland. This video documents the demise of the power station in the 1990's and concludes with the demolition of the 240ft chimney stack in 1999. This event became of particular interest, a defining moment in the long industrial heritage of Arigna.

When planning 'I always wanted to be a windmill' my contribution for the exhibition phase of 'New Sites-New Fields' I found my thoughts returning again and again to site of the former ESB station and the act of energy production. By harnessing human-generated electricity I could re-activate something that has been the essence of this site for so many years. Using our own bo dies in this context creates a direct relationship with energy production and a renewed understanding of a force that we so often take for granted.

When accessing the site directly was not permitted, I realised that its positioning on the shores of Lough Allen could work to my advantage. I decided to take this iconic footage of the tower been knocked and project it onto one of the remaining buildings from a boat on the lake. The energy required to run this projector would of course have to be human generated. I have installed a bike wheel electricity generator within a row-boat. This mechanism was used to charge a series of batteries and ultimately to power the projector.

In October 2008, myself and three others rowed from Cormongon Pier to the far side of Lough Allen. Using solely human generated energy I projected from the 'prepared' boat back onto the site of the power station. The projection was witnessed from boats on the lake and the audience included a number of people who had a relationship with the site such as Johnny Flynn, who laid the final brick on the top of the chimney stack in 1958 and Noel Mc Partland, a former employee who produced the video.

Documentation of this event is currently on display in the Leitrim Sculpture Centre, Manorhamilton and will be presented once again this December at The Dock, Carrick on Shannon.

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