

LEITRIM SCULPTURE CENTRE

Seán O'Reilly

ESTABLISHED IN 1997, the Leitrim Sculpture Centre (LSC) is based in Manorhamilton, County Leitrim. It provides a major resource for the advancement of skills and knowledge in traditional, contemporary, and experimental visual arts. LSC supports the material practices of artists including research and experimentation, and furthers creative engagement with the wider contexts of place and community.

During 2007/08 it went through a radical transformation that saw its two buildings in Manorhamilton, North Leitrim completely renovated. Underlying the overall design was a commitment to increased technical resources and physical space for professional artists and local communities.

The result of this extensive work is now the most comprehensively equipped visual arts resource in Ireland. Spaces are dedicated to work in stone, ceramics, glass, woodwork and mouldmaking including a fully resourced iron forge, bronze foundry and metal fabrication area. These workshops occupy the rear of the factory on New Line (N16) and consist of large open planned areas. To the front of the factory is a very

Michelle Browne *Artist*



Fiona Mulholland *Artist*

impressive gallery space that in itself can be ranked as one of the most adaptable visual arts venues in the country. On the first floor the project space caters for workshops and community activities.

The second building in the centre of town on Main Street houses the integrated printmaking areas, (etching, lithography and silkscreen) together with digital design and print; photography and library/archive all of which adjoin the garden areas to the rear. Distributed across both buildings are 14 professional artists studios supporting artists working across all visual arts and crafts media.

Of course the centre exists for all artists and community members and so you don't need a studio to use the facilities. Artists can either book specific bay areas, or simply use a range of space to work for short or longer periods as suits. Similarly community groups can hire the centre's facilities and project spaces for their own workshops or events. As all the facilities are subsidised and supported by Arts Council funding, the centre maintains the cost of using space and facilities at a low rate.

The main focus of the centre is to maintain an open and dynamic space for creative and experimental practice and to support artists of all types, age, and experience, to develop new work and to broaden their experience and horizons, through the exchange of skills and knowledge. This can be part of the professional development of the artist, or through more participatory projects and ventures that invite community involvement, be it school groups, community organisations or the general public, tourists and local businesses.

The programme is wide ranging: workshops or masterclasses are provided each month, and in the course of a season, will include training in all of the main visual arts and crafts processes. Both professional and emerging artists and members of the community can participate and there is a range of levels from basic to advanced in which people can get involved. LSC is interested to explore further training initiatives with local and national partners and to extend the benefits of creative practice in terms of professional development and the further



enhancement and increase of public participation.

Each year the centre, in association with the Arts Office of Leitrim County Council, hosts five professional artists residencies, and in partnership with Sligo County Council they support The Fred Conlon Contemporary Sculpture Award. These residencies support a major part of the gallery programme, offering artists the opportunity to develop their practice and careers. Artists come from Ireland or anywhere in the world and stay for two months in Manorhamilton, making new work which is exhibited in their final week. Great excitement and intrigue surround these exchanges because in all cases this is the first time this work gets to be seen and artists often try completely new ideas and techniques. The exhibition space functions like a laboratory for artists to test-out new projects and ideas, and offers the public a rare chance to get close to the production of art work, and how the artist is thinking.

Not all of the work takes place inside the buildings of the centre. Part of the programme involves the research and development of projects outside the gallery in a variety of social and environmental contexts. Some of this work is



Karl Burke Artist

realised on-site, others are brought back to the gallery or use a mixture of exhibition space and real spaces around the town, or within rural contexts. Notable previous projects in this type of work include: Lough MacNea Sculpture Trail; Sense in Place 2005/06; New Sites-New Fields and the Peace III Project, Fields of Vision. Many of these projects involve the participation of local communities, groups and schools, and involve the exploration of local landscapes, people and places through arts practice. Within these contexts the centre supports a programme of artistic and social interac-

tion within open spaces and sites for learning, experimentation, and creative fieldwork activity.

Leitrim Sculpture Centre is a registered charity and, as well as being funded on a regular basis by the Arts Council, many of the above events have been supported by European Culture 2000; Leitrim Development Company, Leitrim Peace III Partnership and other European and national funding organisations.

The above activities as well as the workshops, residencies, projects and community engagements that form the larger programme, are collated in the centres library and archive on Main Street. This information reflects not only LSC's own activity but develops links to national and international arts initiatives concerned with the collective exploration of creative practice, and the development of these in the wider contexts of society.

Everyone is welcome to drop into the centre or visit the art exhibitions. Opportunities exist to meet the artists about their work, or take one of our many courses. We especially welcome those who may be nervous and fearful of engaging with such an environment for lack of experience or exposure to the art world. This centre is for everyone and strives to support the creative practice of professional artists and community members alike.

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Johnnie Lawson Artist