

MidART

TEN COLLABORATIVE ARTISTS WORKING IN IRELAND'S MIDWEST



Image: Stephen Hartigan

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Curated and edited by Maeve McGrath

The GAFF would like to thank all the artists and community partners who supported this project

Image: Keith Wiseman

Introduction

Collaborative arts practice has seen a rich growth in the Midwest region of Ireland in recent years. Sometimes referred to as community arts or socially engaged practice, collaborative projects and programmes essentially involve connection between professional artists and communities of place or of interest.

The GAFF now presents **MidART**, a publication that shines a light on artists who are currently working or who have recently worked with community groups in different locations across Limerick and Clare. The list comprises artists engaging communities through dance, theatre, visual art, music and spectacle.

We hope that this publication promotes contemporary, collaborative arts practice in our region and we welcome suggestions for future publications.



AOIFE
MCGARRY



Aoife McGarry is a Limerick-based performer, choreographer, and teacher. Originally from Dublin, she trained at the Naomh Fionnbarra School of Irish Dance and the Billie Barry Stage School. Aoife graduated with both a BA and an MA in Dance Performance from the University of Limerick. Since then, she has established her own company, Eala Dance & Fitness, and teaches regularly with the Limerick & Clare Education & Training Board, The Pilates Room, and on the dance degree programmes at the University of Limerick.

In partnership with the Local Creative Youth Partnership (LCYP), Aoife created *Inspire Magic: An Interactive Dance Show for Babies*. This initiative explores how babies and toddlers can have a voice in decision-making regarding the design and delivery of dance curricula through workshops and performances. *Inspire Magic* intertwines elements of storytelling, dance, and music to craft a vibrant tapestry of sensory exploration. The project was piloted in 2023 at two centres in Limerick City, and in 2024, was expanded to bring the initiative to seven centres across Limerick and Clare.





Image: Five Element Photography

JOHN LILLIS

John Lillis is a multi-disciplinary artist based in North Clare. His practice includes music, recording, curation and community arts, and his work is influenced by themes such as imagination, landscape, Jungian psychology and folklore. He is registered with the Teaching Council of Ireland and has been working in community arts and education for over fifteen years. His work is supported by the Arts Council, Clare Arts Office and Creative Ireland, and has featured collaborations with The GAFF, Clare Youth Service, and The Brothers of Charity. He is a performing DJ at festivals across the country under the alias of Mynameisjohn.

John currently delivers a number of collaborative projects with Clare Arts Office, including the recent *Dial a Seanchaí*, a contemporary re-imagining of the 1988 project introduced by the Clare Arts Officer at that time, Kay Sheehy.

Dial a Seanchaí continues to enthrall the public as a unique audio experience with some of Ireland's most respected artists and storytellers and has included Kevin Barry, Eddie Lenihan, Junior Brother, Aindrias de Staic and Lisa O'Neill.





ELEANOR
FEELY



Eleanor is an artist whose practice has been embedded in community work in Clare for many years, working across several disciplines and in intergenerational contexts. She originally trained as an actor at the Stanislavski Studio in the Focus Theatre, Dublin and at the Theatre du Soleil in Paris. She has worked in Mountjoy prison and in a wide range of community settings as well as in The Abbey Theatre. In 2023, she collaborated with three young artists, in a performance, video and soundscape entitled *Raising the Wind* which was set in a liminal space off the west coast and in the Hebrides and performed in glór.

In recent years, she set up a radio programme for residents of St. Joseph's hospital, Ennis where she was artist in residence with initiatives that included producing a CD with residents, comprising music and interviews. As a director of Clare Youth Theatre, her work is widely respected with many young adults citing their experience under Eleanor's direction as seminal, playing a vital part in their personal and artistic development. Her emphasis as a youth theatre director prioritises developing the artistic and ensemble skills of young people to create works of importance to them and over which they have autonomy.



ANA COLOMER



Ana is a visual artist and educator based in Ennis, Co. Clare. With a background in fine arts from Seville University and additional training in art therapy from CIT, Ana has dedicated her career to socially engaged art. Her practice spans painting, puppetry, animation, film, and multimedia installations, often combining multiple elements to create interactive, thought-provoking works. Ana works as a tutor with the LCYP and LCETB, as a Creative Associate with Creative Schools and as an Associate Artist with Helium Arts. In each of these roles, she emphasises the value of creativity as a means of self-expression, fostering environments where participants feel empowered to share their voices.

Her last collaborative project was *Who do you think we are?*, a film with Streetwise at Brothers of Charity, that addressed fundamental themes of identity, personal rights, and often-misguided assumptions people make when interacting with individuals with intellectual disabilities. Rather than focusing on the external, this project gives participants the chance to share their inner lives, dreams, and perceptions, offering a candid look at their values, aspirations, and the stereotypes they face. The film, funded by the LCYP, ultimately became a statement of self-advocacy and self-definition, challenging societal misconceptions and affirming each person's right to be seen as they truly are.



Image: 40hertz

SHANNEN SLATTERY

A graduate of LSAD, with a First Class Honours Degree, Shannen is a visual artist and art educator based in Limerick, with a practice that bridges photography, painting, and embroidery to explore identity, heritage, and social justice. Shannen's work celebrates the vibrancy and resilience of Limerick communities, challenging stereotypes and highlighting diverse voices. Through her multidisciplinary approach, she seeks to foster dialogue and inspire positive change. As a Community Arts Worker with The GAFF, Shannen engages with young people based in clubs in the West End Youth Centre, Southill Hub, and Southside Boxing Club.



Shannen's approach seeks to reach and listen to the seldom heard voice, seeking to create art that reflects and amplifies community stories. Through her work, she invites people to connect with art in a way that deepens their sense of place and belonging, fostering dialogue and connection across communities.

Partnering with music producer 40hertz, she co-facilitates cross-disciplinary workshops to empower young people to explore art and music through self-directed projects, fostering creativity, confidence, and ownership of their artistic journey.





Image: Keith Wiseman





FRANK MCCARTHY

Frank is a socially engaged visual artist, musician and graduate of LSAD, who has been actively developing his practice as a multi-disciplinary artist and tutor through volunteering and collaborating with a myriad of schools, organisations, and fellow like-minded artists and musicians.

This experience has led to the evolution of his creative approach and the ethos of his practice, both personally and professionally. The aim of his work is to create opportunity, accessibility, inclusion and illumination for people from underrepresented communities and marginalised groups across Ireland and beyond.



Paint Punch was inspired by young Traveller boys from Abbeyfeale, who were working with Frank on a music project. Throughout the workshop process, Frank observed the physical movements of the young participants who shadow-boxed almost continually. His idea to use boxing gloves to punch paint onto sheets of plywood was pioneered in St. Mary's Boys School, Abbeyfeale and has expanded to engage over one hundred participants in Galway, Ennis, Kilmallock, Askeaton and Limerick City. Delivered initially by The LCYP and The GAFF, further collaborators include Misleór, Galway, Ballyhoura Development Company, Learning Hub Limerick, Clare Youth Service & Limerick Youth Service in Askeaton.



Image: Stephen Hartigan



GRÁINNE Ó' hUIGINN

Gráinne is a cellist, singer, and music educator from Portroe, Co. Tipperary and a graduate of Munster Technical University. She is Director and Conductor of Cantette Children's Choir and Cello Tutor with ICO Schools (formerly Sing Out With Strings) where she enjoys collaborating with a team of music educators to bring musicianship skills, instrumental studies and ensemble playing into local schools. Gráinne is an enthusiastic ensemble musician and an advocate for more inclusive music spaces. As a Cello Tutor with ICO Schools she helps to empower young musicians to reach their full potential, providing her students with knowledge and understanding of the music they will encounter throughout their lives.

Gráinne is passionate about her current work as a music teacher in St. Mary's Primary School in Bishop St., Limerick. The Irish Chamber Orchestra's community engagement programme facilitates classroom music of quality from an early age, advocating the transformative power of music and its profound impact. Since 2008, *ICO Schools* has educated over 3,000 students across two primary and five secondary schools in Limerick City. *ICO Schools*, a model for social inclusion, offers opportunities, develops key life skills, and provides tangible long-term benefits for students, their families, and the wider community.





AISLING RYAN



Aisling is a performer and educator with a degree in Theatre and Drama from Mary Immaculate College. She has studied Community Development at Chester University and in the renowned Stella Adler Acting Academy in New York. Based in Limerick, Aisling continues to perform regularly and is passionate about inclusivity, collaborating with diverse groups to identify, celebrate and develop their unique talents and stories for stage and film. Through her commitment to performance, education, and community development, Aisling strives to shape aspiring artists and to enrich the cultural lives of their community.

Aisling currently facilitates *Building Bridges*, a drama programme with a group of young Travellers living in Kilmallock. A joint programme between Ballyhoura Development, Friars Gate Theatre and Tasc, Building Bridges aims to identify participants' strengths, fostering growth and personal development. As an educator with a background in teaching the dramatic arts, Aisling brings a holistic approach to her work, nurturing not just the skills of performance but also the emotional and intellectual growth of participants. This comprehensive perspective allows for the creation of a dynamic and supportive learning environment where creativity and personal expression thrive.





Image: Keith Wiseman

MONICA SPENCER

Monica Spencer is an independent cultural producer and drama facilitator who has worked with community groups across Limerick City and County through several decades. She is a graduate of the University of Limerick's Festive Arts Masters programme and has developed a diverse range of festivals, theatre events, visual art programmes, films and multidisciplinary arts projects throughout her career. She is a board member of The GAFF where she works with fellow directors to sustain a physical space for the development of artist-led, community-focused work programmes in the Midwest.



Image: Lucy Dawson

Monica has had a connection with community groups in St. Marys in Limerick City for several years and continues to work with young people through the Nicholas St. Branch of Limerick Youth Service, developing drama programmes with a focus on creating short scripts for performance. She has also worked with an adult group from St. Mary's for *The Parish*, a promenade, site-specific theatre event in 2023. She continues to engage with adult participants from this project who will join a professional production of *The Rising of the Women*, a new play by Mike Finn to be staged in the same community in 2025.



Image: Lucy Dawson

Image: Giordana Giaché



MARTIN SHANNON

Martin is a painter, sculptor, and printmaker. He holds degrees in Fine Art Sculpture and Printmaking, and a master's degree in fine art from LSAD. He was selected for Ev+A in 2005, Invited to Headlines Exhibition 2004, Invited to Seconds: The Imperfect Artwork in 2006, has had a residency in 411 Galleries in China, and has exhibited widely both nationally and internationally. Since 2016 Martin has been Artistic Director of Lumen Street Theatre, an award-winning Street Theatre company based in Limerick City. His role there is as Director and as lead sculptor/maker of props, puppets, and floats. He has worked in TV and in theatre on set design and prop-building.

Image: Deirdre Power



Lumen Street Theatre engages communities in the creative process through visual spectacle, presenting performances that are spectacular, distinctive, and uplifting within the urban environment of Limerick. Lumen continuously engages in events that foster ongoing relationships with local, national and international artists, arts organisations and local community groups, with the aim to expand and upscale the festival. The company comprises practicing artists whose ongoing professional development benefits the festival participants by sharing knowledge, ideas and expertise. Lumen's ethos adds to the vibrant artistic life of Limerick, collaborating with communities in co-creating innovative works.



Image: Deirdre Power

CREATIVE COMMUNITIES MIDWEST (CCM)

In 2021 The GAFF, based in Limerick, established a professionally-resourced network called *Creative Communities Midwest (CCM)* to connect arts practitioners and community stakeholders. Since the beginning of 2021, CCM has engaged with artists and communities in the Midwest through meetings, conferences and arts programmes including a story-based project, *Tiny Little Histories*.

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