

[art@work]

Artists Residency Programme

[*Martina Cleary @ Cruachan Aí*]

Cruachan Aí Heritage Centre in Tulsk, Co. Roscommon, is the interpretative centre for Rathcroghan—a complex of over 200 archaeological monuments—which has been the seat of power in Connacht for thousands of years. We have exhibition rooms and guided tours, meeting and conference rooms for hire as a cultural venue, a café and craft shop.

MARTINA CLEARY - artist

What interests you about making art?

For me making art is a way of navigating through and understanding the world. It is a process of learning and a means to communicate that which often cannot be expressed in any other way. When it works, it serves to unify complexities and open up perception to alternative ways of seeing. What interests me most in this process is the potential it offers to contribute to an ongoing conversation, while enjoying the continual element of surprise at the core of creativity.

What initially drew you to art@work?

I was interested in the *art@work* programme because of the potential it offered to open up my practice from being the often insular research of a visual artist, to one which engages in dialogues and interactions with the community of a particular place. I felt this would help me reposition my practice through gaining a kind of concentrated access to researchers, experts and authentic material which is rarely possible when just visiting or passing through a place.

Did you originally see any connection with what the company does and your work?

I am a visual artist working with photography, drawing and video and am interested in researching and documenting sites of historical, archaeological and anthropological interest in rural Ireland. I gather traces of events, memories and stories associated with the built environment and location. In one way my practice was already an intuitive artistic archaeological dig into the past.

I was especially interested in the conceptual and visual overlaps between arts-based research and archaeological research e.g. their mutual use of detailed drawing, mapping, journals, field-notes and documentary photography to navigate space, memory, scientific evidence and imaginative speculation.

What noteworthy or significant stages or experiences did your process go through during the residency?

Significantly for me, the more I observed and spoke with the archaeologists the more I began to re-examine and re-invent my own process of selection and interpretation. I particularly enjoyed trying to appropriate archaeological systems of classification to look at 'living' contemporary subject matter. Learning to look at something again and again, in a very slow, calculated and patient way; learning to see everything that is present in a context as relevant, rather than recording what is only significant to the moment or the subjective interest of the observer was important for me.

Context: Ouseyella well.

Behaviour: Customs of throwing objects into water and leaving votive offerings.



“Martina’s work captures a depth of meaning and an essence of emotion that standard archaeological recording cannot.”

[Dr. Niall Brady - archaeologist for The Discovery Programme]

In what way did this process of creating work differ to your normal working practices?

Firstly, I had access to a far wider and varied number of sources from the outset. There were people on site who could very effectively point me towards knowledge and information that usually takes a long time to unearth when working alone in the studio. Being the artist in residence also provided me with a very clear context from which I could approach people in the local community. Most of my time during the residency was given to gathering as much information as possible as events, particularly the archaeological dig, were unfolding. The extent of the interactivity of this process was a new and valuable way of working.

In what way did this process of creating work differ to other residential contexts?

Other residences I am familiar with have been more studio-based, which usually means working alone in a designated, set aside space. The residency was overall far more interactive, involving far more daily discussion and communication with other people than the usual residency context.

If your work practice changed during the residency, how has it changed and what influenced these shifts in your practice?

The biggest change in my practice is that I am now far more interested in pursuing projects that are collaborative and community based. The experience allowed me to test out my own abilities and capacities to create in this way. The fact that the programme was really well run and that the people I worked with at the Cruachan Aí Visitor Centre were incredibly supportive, interested, and open to my project were key influences in facilitating this change.

LORA O'BRIEN - MD Cruachan Aí

What were your expectations of art@work?

Honestly, we didn't know what to expect! We were excited to have a creative exploration on what has hitherto been a majorly academic arena.

Was having this artist in residence different in any way to what you expected?

No, she threw a new light and perspective on familiar areas.

What do you think were the benefits to the company of having an artist in residence?

Martina Cleary's work in the community has enabled local people to participate and be interested in their heritage in a different way. Public relations are improved and fortified.

Did you discover anything new about how artists work?

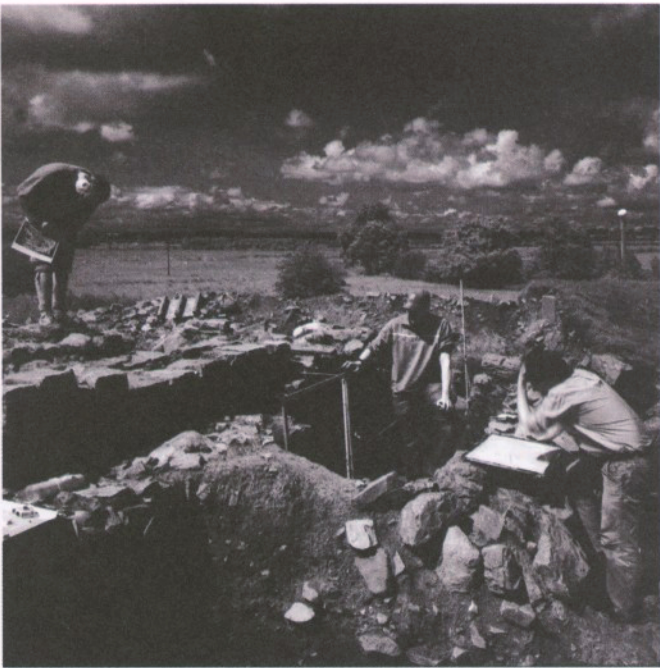
Not personally, but the staff would not have been familiar with the processes of an artist, nor probably were people overly familiar with the archaeological processes that she was exploring and highlighting through her work.

Did the artists work have any effect on how you or the staff see your own business?

Martina was a breath of fresh air, pleasant and accommodating to work with and be around, and her enthusiasm for the sites and the centre is rejuvenating.



Title - 'Maebh'



Title - 'The Dig'