

Artist in the Community Scheme Artist Mentoring Award 2025

Mentor Biographies

The mentors available for pairing in 2025 are Ruairí Ó'Donnabháin, Tomasz Madajczak, Dr. Sinead McCann, Alan James Burns, Oluwatobi Balogun, Grace Dyas and Séamus Nolan. In addition to the individual mentor-mentee pairings, artist Kate O'Shea will work with mentees throughout the programme, but will not be available for individual pairings. Former artist mentors Cathy Coughlan, Michelle Browne and Aisling Byrne will serve as programme advisors and will not be available for pairings. Previous mentors include John Conway, Deirdre O'Mahony, Feidlim Cannon and Jijo Sebastian.

Mentors available for pairing in 2025

Alan James Burns (they/ them) is a neurodivergent, environmental and audiovisual artist, curator and festival maker producing interactive, socially engaged and site-specific projects with comprehensive learning and engagement programmes. The focal points of their highly collaborative research-based practice are disability, climate emergency and a just society. Motivated by a conviction that art can create lasting change, they collaborate with communities including on projects such as 'Sound On!' (2020-22) and 'Our Place' (2023-25), with adults with intellectual disabilities, and 'Waking Walls' (2023) with rural communities. Integral to their projects is social space for discussion, collective learning and reflection.

Alan James takes an intersecting approach where they both coach (support you to find the answer within yourself and they remain impartial) and mentor (suggest direction, techniques and advice from experience). Alan James works to support those with a developed practice who want to advance their leadership skills, improve their performance or develop their careers. They regularly work with people who want to develop their understanding of accessibility and Inclusion in the arts sector.

Grace Dyas (she/her) is an artist and activist working in theatre, film, and conceptual art. Her socially engaged practice uses art to provoke change and reimagine the world. She has extensive experience supporting artists at all stages, helping them clarify ideas, develop projects, and navigate funding. She works with those outside the mainstream, guiding them to sustain independent practices while staying true to their vision. Her approach to mentorship is collaborative, reflective, and artist-led. She fosters a supportive space where artists take risks, build confidence, and create ambitious, meaningful work. The areas she is passionate about include participatory and socially engaged art, trauma-informed practice, and campaign-based work. She brings expertise in dramaturgy, audience development, project planning, and funding strategy. Through Art Help, she has mentored artists in shaping their careers, developing applications, and building impactful projects, with a deep commitment to making the arts accessible and transformative.

Oluwatobi Balogun (he/him) is a Nigerian-Irish interdisciplinary artist whose work spans visual art, dance, film, and spoken word. Drawing on the rich traditions of Yoruba culture, non-binary concepts, and Afrofuturism, his art seeks to reimagine cultural narratives and craft new global perspectives. As an artist working in collaboration with communities, he has curated and led projects such as Black Canvas and Eascair in partnership with Dance Ireland, Create, and STAND.

Grounded in a reflective and supportive approach to mentorship, he fosters creative confidence by encouraging dialogue, experimentation, and critical thinking. Passionate about decolonial narratives, the intersections of community and identity, and the power of collective storytelling, by weaving together traditional techniques and contemporary aesthetics, he helps mentees refine their artistic voices while challenging conventional narratives. Whether through one-on-one mentorship or group collaboration, Oluwatobi champions creative expression as a tool for empowerment, transformation, and meaningful engagement with the world.

Ruairí Ó Donnabháin is a language activist and a choreographer; he is making ritual objects for a tribe which doesn't exist. Ó Donnabháin has been making dances in Ireland since 2008. He is a Masters in Choreography Graduate from DAS Graduate School Amsterdam & holds a joint honors B.A. in Drama & Theatre Studies and English from University College Cork. Ó Donnabháin is from County Cork and his choreographic practice is concerned with 'aesthetic practices of care'. He lives and works on Oileán Chléire, a remote island and Gaeltacht off the south west coast of Co. Cork investigating Gaeilge as a site of queer resistance and new materialist collaboration 'in the wild'.

Is gníomhaí teanga agus choreografadóir é **Ruairí Ó Donnabháin**, tá sé ag thógáil uirlisí deasghnáth de treibh atá chaillte. Bíonn sé ag eagrú damhsaí in Éireann ó 2008. Tá Máistreacht aige i Choreografaí ó DAS Graduate School Amstardam agus Céim Onóracha dhá ábhar i Béarla agus Dramaíocht ó Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh. Is as Chontae Chorcaí é Ó Donnabháin agus tá a taidhde faoi 'chleachtais aeistéitíc chúraim'. Tá sé ag obair ar agus ag chur Oileán Chléire fuann.

Séamus Nolan (he/they) is an artist and doctoral student at the School of Art History and Cultural Policy, UCD, the School of Visual Culture, NCAD, and the Collections Department at IMMA. His practice-based research examines the role of contemporary museums in representing marginal cultures, with a specific focus on Irish Travellers.

Nolan is the recipient of the 2024 O'Malley Art Award. Recent artworks and curatorial projects include Hereditas, a collaborative artwork with CAIRDE, Sligo Arts Festival, and the Sligo Traveller Support Group. Séamus likes to work collaboratively with people, places and institutions but also understands that collaboration can go in different directions, sometimes it's one way, sometimes reciprocal and sometimes explosive. Whether formal or informal, mentoring, for Séamus, is about learning from other people how to support and challenge one other in the work.

Dr Sinéad McCann (she/her) is a multidisciplinary socially engaged artist, committed to investigating and responding to social inequality through her art practice. Sinéad leads and develops cross-sector collaborations, with artists, staff, researchers and service users in community-based organisations, universities, networks and groups. Her previous work has focused on the areas of disability, addiction, homelessness, prison, mental health, men's health, survivors' stories, women's health, social care, theory and policy.

Sinéad's expertise is rooted in practice which is expressed using lived testimony and documentary elements in theatre-based production, accessible immersive gallery installations, gallery-based video and sculpture installation, performance, multi-channel audio/visual site-specific installation, site specific sound installation, radio programming and street and site-specific performance engaging diverse audiences. Her approach to mentoring is rooted in deep listening, reflective conversations, and critical discussion that makes connections between society, ideas, people and art practice.

Tomasz Madajczak (he/him) is a Polish-born artist based in Ireland since 2003. His practice is deeply rooted in collaborative and reflective artistic exploration. He employs deep listening as a core methodology, inviting individuals and groups into multilayered, site-specific engagements that integrate photography, sound, video, and objects into immersive spatial experiences. Tomasz has received numerous awards from the Irish Arts Council, Cork County Council, and Create, and his work has been exhibited across Europe and beyond. Recent projects include NoSpace, Thought Space, Hybrid Identity, Areas of Presence, Listening Stones, Small Stories, Liquid Presence, and The Realm of Trauma.

As a mentor, Tomasz fosters a supportive and process-driven environment, encouraging artists to explore their unique voices through dialogue, experimentation, and transcultural exchange. His expertise spans intermedia arts, site-specific storytelling, and immersive installation, with a strong passion for narrative structures, identity, and environmental interactions.

Group Mentor

Kate O'Shea (she/her) is a socially engaged artist who works across printmaking, archiving, large-scale installation, performance, and publishing. Recent work includes "Revolutionary Archivists" (2024), commissioned by the Bothy Project and Community Land Scotland. Kate is co-founder of the transdisciplinary collective, Broken Fields, co-founder of independent publishing house Durty Books; and co-founder of The People's Kitchen.

Mentoring is a key part of Kate's practice. She credits much of her work to the incredible teachers, friends and mentors who have guided her. Working as both a one-to-one mentor and group mentor in different contexts, she allows space for artists to return to their roots and work through why they do what they do. Her approach to mentoring is process-led and heart-led, driven by the current needs of the artist or group of artists. Kate is passionate about the necessity of peer-to-peer support networks.

Programme Mentors

Aisling Byrne (she/her) is a multi-award winning writer, director and collaborative artist working across theatre and film. She is the founder and Artistic Director of Run of the Mill Arts, a leading inclusive arts organisation platforming and supporting intellectually disabled artists and participants. She is passionate about socially engaged storytelling, working with communities and amplifying seldom-heard narratives. Aisling takes a collaborative and reciprocal approach to mentorship and seeks to create a framework for a series of supportive and mutually enriching encounters. Aisling is skilled in supporting artists who wish to consider, consolidate and/or leverage their practice and broker new relationships through community collaboration.

Cathy Coughlan (she/ her) is a multidisciplinary artist, curator and producer. As an artist working in a collaboration with communities Cathy has delivered projects and performances across the country, in association with arts centres, community arts organisations, charities, local authorities and dance theatres. Cathy's approach to mentorship is responsive and led by the needs of the artist. This might include the development of an idea, introductions to other artists, communities and organisations, funding advice or project management.

Cathy is passionate about access and cultural diversity. With Dance as her primary art form, she has created spaces that are open to everyone. Cathy was producer for Dance2Connect Festival from 2017 – 2021, a collaboration with Polish Dance Artist Mateusz Szczerek. From 2020 - 2025 Cathy worked at Project Arts Centre as Head of Project Potential, where a key part of her role involved mentorship and consultation with emerging artists, communities and organisations.

Michelle Browne is an artist and educator based in Dublin Ireland. She works in socially engaged performative practice with a focus on the built environment. Her recent projects include the creation of an audio experience through the landscape of Carlow commissioned by Carlow Arts Festival, developed with communities from across the region; the development of a new board game about work commissioned by Heart of Glass, St. Helens UK; and Bring Your Own Chair, a series of performative events in public space across the South East of Ireland to consider what it means to live in small rural communities today. She is a lecturer in the Department of Sculpture and Expanded Practice at the National College of Art and Design in Dublin.

Previous Mentors

Deirdre O'Mahony (she/her) has an impressive 30 year track record in making work across sculpture, painting, installation and participatory projects. She has extensive experience in mentoring, working with artists and organisations engaging with diverse contexts and communities, particularly in rural areas. At the centre of this work is her interest in the politics of landscape, rural/urban relationships, sustainability, farming and food security and the role of art in bringing together diverse communities, alternate forms of knowledge, embracing art as a critical space to help us see things differently.

She has received numerous Arts Council of Ireland awards and residencies and her work is held in public and private collections including the Arts Council of Ireland and the Irish Museum of Modern Art.

Feidlim Cannon is an award-winning writer and director for Stage and Screen. His Theatre and Film work has been programmed in Europe, America, Canada and Australasia. Feidlim is Co-Artistic Director of the internationally renowned Theatre company Brokentaklers. As an artist, practitioner, and founding member of Brokentaklers, Feidlim strives to make original work that speaks directly and honestly to its audience, making work that challenges conventional form while staying accessible. Feidlim teaches staging performance at University College Dublin.

Jijo Sebastian is a collaborative filmmaker with more than fifteen years of experience in participatory, collaborative and transcultural filmmaking in community-based contexts. He was awarded an Artist in the Community Scheme Project Realisation Award in 2015, an Arts Council 'Next Generation' Bursary Award in 2016, an Arts Participation Bursary (2020) and The Hugh Lane Gallery and Create joint commission in 2023 for the Salmagundi project.

He has co-written, directed and edited eight short films and one tele-film collaborating with individuals, groups and families from the Keralite Indian community and others in Ireland. Selected films have been screened at international film festivals. His practice and films find coherence in their shared immigrant-oriented themes, participatory methodologies and suburban Dublin geographical context. The key concerns that underpin his practice and current thematics are transcultural space, intercultural relations, the complex nature of immigrant identity and its trajectory of transitioning.

John Conway is one of Ireland's foremost socially engaged visual artists. His work is characterised by innovative multi-disciplinary projects produced in response to sensitive and challenging community contexts.

His projects occur across art forms including sculpture, installation, moving image, audio, theatre, virtual reality, publication, and curation. His prolific working process is characterized by experimentation with sculptural and artistic forms, acute listening, sensitivity to context and a robust interrogation of artistic processes across collaborative contextual work and formalised gallery output. John is a 3-year studio resident at Temple Bar Gallery and Studios.

About Create

Create is the national development agency for collaborative arts in social and community contexts. Create supports artists across all artforms who work collaboratively with communities in different social and community contexts, be they communities of place or those brought together by interest. The organisation seeks to foster current and future potential for collaboration between artists and communities, encouraging art projects that reflect the exciting ways in which collaborative arts can represent a complex range of ideas and approaches. As a resource organisation we offer supports for artists working in social and community contexts. These include professional development, mentoring, project development support, commissioning and project opportunities as well as research and training. Create believes that by working together, artists and communities can purposefully explore how collaborative arts can engage in distinct, relevant and powerful ways with the urgent social, cultural and political issues of our times.

For further information on Create please see www.create-ireland.ie

The Mentoring Award is funded through the Artist in the Community Scheme (AIC), managed by Create on a devolved basis for The Arts Council. The AIC Scheme is a primary vehicle for collaborative socially engaged arts practice in Ireland.