

Artist in the Community Scheme Artist Mentoring Award 2026

Mentor Biographies

The mentors available for pairing in 2026 are Oluwatobi Balogun, Alan James Burns, Feidlim Cannon, Cathy Coughlan, Grace Dyas, Tomasz Madajczak, Séamus Nolan, Deirdre O'Mahony, Eve Olney, Silvina Sisterna and Dominic Thorpe.

In addition to the individual mentor-mentee pairings, artist Dr Sinéad McCann will work with mentees throughout the programme, but will not be available for individual pairings. Former artist mentors Aisling Byrne, Ruairí Ó Donnabháin and Kate O'Shea will serve as programme advisors and will not be available for pairings.

Mentors available for pairing in 2026

Oluwatobi Balogun (he/him) is a Nigerian-Irish interdisciplinary artist whose work spans visual art, dance, design, 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.

Grounded in a reflective and supportive approach to mentorship, he fosters creative confidence by encouraging dialogue, experimentation, and critical thinking. Passionate about sustainability, 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. Oluwatobi champions creative expression as a tool for empowerment, transformation, and meaningful engagement with the world.

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. Integral to their projects is social space for discussion, collective learning and reflection.

Alan James takes an intersecting approach where they both coach and mentor people. 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.

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.

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. 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.

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.

Tomasz Madajczak (he/him) Perceives Art as a living form of communication. His approach is deeply collaborative and experimental. His methodology is rooted in deep listening, sensitivity to the unexpected and phenomenological alignments. His artistic practice explores intersections between photography, video, sound, object making and embodied performative practice. With a strong passion for narrative structures, identity, and environmental interaction, Tomasz supports artistic development at the intersection of concept, space, multi-media and relational values of lived experience.

As a mentor, Tomasz cultivates an active open space dedicated to experimentation and exploration of new ideas, environments, and artistic approaches. He creates a supportive framework in which artists can discover their individual strengths and identify the most powerful ways to apply them in developing and advancing their creative processes toward meaningful outcomes.

Séamus Nolan (he/they) is an artist whose recent 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 works 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.

Deirdre O'Mahony (She/Her) is a Limerick-born visual artist, recently relocated to Cork. For over thirty years, her practice has focused on the complicated relationship between the land, landscape, and human activity. Her research comes from a deep interest in people and place, using whatever artistic means is most appropriate to the context; socially-engaged projects, plantings and moving image artworks. At the heart of this work is her interest in the politics of landscape, rural/urban relationships, rural sustainability and food security. Deirdre's approach to mentoring is to provide a supportive space in which to unpack the concerns and issues around a mentee's artistic practice and offer career advice including application development.

Eve Olney (she/her) is a Cork-based researcher and creative producer whose praxis is rooted in socially engaged art, social justice through collective action (Transformative Collaboration), and art as a tool for political and ethical questioning. Her work frequently operates through dialogue, process, and sustained engagement rather than fixed outcomes. Eve's approach to mentoring is through a framework of self-reflective processes that explore the artists' personal motivation and relationship to the concept and work. This understanding is then used as the foundational basis for how the artist might approach and work with others, considering ethical and political positioning, responsibility and reviewing developing work through a self/ collective reflective process.

Silvina Sisterna (she/her) is an Argentine multidisciplinary visual artist, writer, and socially engaged practitioner. Her work operates across photography, text, walking practices, and participatory methodologies, developed through long-term collaborations with migrant and women's communities. Her practice examines memory, displacement, belonging, and the social and political structures that shape lived experience, often using analogue and experimental photographic processes.

Silvina's approach to mentorship is collaborative, reflective, and process-oriented. She creates supportive spaces where dialogue, experimentation, and critical thinking can unfold without pressure for immediate outcomes. She values care, curiosity, and the co-creation of knowledge. Silvina brings expertise in participatory methodologies, project development, critical reflection, and shaping strong funding applications and conceptually coherent artistic work. Her mentoring supports participants in developing their voice, strengthening conceptual thinking, and translating ideas into meaningful artistic processes.

Dominic Thorpe is an Irish visual artist who works through performance art, video, photography, drawing, installation, collaborative and relational based processes. Much of his work addresses contemporary and historical violence, human rights, and institutional abuses. In recent years, his focus has expanded to include an exploration of individual and collective perpetrator trauma. He has engaged and collaborated with people in a range of projects related to arts and disability, migration and arts and health. He has undertaken several educational and mentorship roles, including supporting people to make work in contexts of arts and disability, wellbeing and within formal education contexts. His approach is to be encouraging and support artists to strategically plan their work and practice.

Group Mentor

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.

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.

Is gníomhaí teanga agus choreografaí é **Ruairí Ó Donnabháin** (sé/é nó he/him), 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, cheann eile aige i Fís Ealaín agus Timpeallacht ó TU Dublin / Inis Arcáin 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 aeistéitice chúraim. Tá sé ag obair ar agus ag chur Oileán Chléire fuann.

Ruairí Ó Donnabháin (sé/é or he/him) is a language activist and a choreographer. Ó Donnabháin has been making dances in Ireland since 2008. He is a Masters in Choreography Graduate from DAS Graduate School Amsterdam, has a Masters in Art and The Environment from TU Dublin / Sherkin & holds a joint honors B.A. in Drama & Theatre Studies and English from University College Cork. Ó Donnabháin is from County Cork and his artistic 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.

He is delighted to be part of the CREATE mentoring panel having spent the last few years learning as much from the inspiring artists he has had the fortune of being in conversation with as they have from him (he hopes). His approach to mentorship is dialogical, supportive and somatic employing social dreaming, holograms and time spent outside. Listening is a radical strategy. Ó Donnabháin is passionate about symposiums, the social body and the marginalised.

Kate O'Shea (she/her) is a socially engaged artist working across printmaking, archiving, large-scale installation, performance, and publishing. In 2025 she undertook a residency exchange between IMMA and Walyalup Fremantle Arts Centre, developing the immersive exhibition JUMP CUTS in collaboration with Aideen O'Donovan. For TULCA Festival of Visual Arts 2025, she co-created A Collection of Ocean Waifs, an audio work exploring the entangled histories of Ireland and Australia. Recent work also includes "Revolutionary Archivists" (2024), commissioned by the Bothy Project and Community Land Scotland.

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 creates space for artists to return to their roots and consider why they do what they do. Her approach is process-led and heart-led, shaped by the needs of the artist or group. Kate is passionate about the necessity of peer-to-peer support networks.

Satellite Mentors, Trainers and Advisors

In addition to the mentors listed above, the Artist Mentoring Award is supported by a group of artists who operate as satellite mentors, facilitators, trainers and advisors to the programme. These include artists Marie Brett, Colette Lewis, Catherine Young, Vanessa Daws, Dragana Jurisis, Evelyn Broderick, Dr. Fiona Whelan, Jijo Sebastian, Tara Carroll, Alice Rekab, Frank Berry, Marielle MacLeman and Dr Ciaran Smyth of Vagabond Reviews, as well as Viviana Checchia, Director, Void Derry, Kim McAleese, Director, Edinburgh Art Festival, Irene O Mara, Lecturer in Speech & Drama, MTU, Ryan J. Matthews-Robinson, founder of Poetic Unity, and Jenny Salmean, Deveron Projects.

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.

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.