

Contemporary Socially Engaged Art Practice in Ireland

Modalities and Counter-Narratives

Edited by Alan Grossman, Anthony Haughey,
Helen Carey and Ailbhe Murphy



Book Launch/ Symposium Programme
10am - 5pm, Friday 6th November 2026
Concert Hall, TU Dublin, Grangegorman

Co-organised by the Centre for Socially Engaged Practice-Based Research at TU Dublin, Create, Fire Station Artists' Studios and Belfast School of Art, the symposium accompanying the book launch will feature a keynote address by internationally acclaimed artist, educator, and writer Professor Suzanne Lacy, alongside two artists' panels with contributing authors to the publication and guests.

By situating socially engaged art practices within a matrix of shifting political realities, community knowledges and evolving cultural narratives, the integrated book launch and symposium will contribute to a deeper understanding of the complexities and multifaceted landscape of socially engaged art in Ireland.

10.00 - 10:30	Welcome by Caroline O'Sullivan, Academic Lead, Culture and Society Research Hub Introduction by Alan Grossman and Anthony Haughey Dedication to Ailbhe Murphy by Helen Carey
10.30 - 12:30	Panel One: <i>'Artists' Methodologies: Collaboration, Ethics and Relations of Solidarity'</i> Panel Chair: Suzanne Lacy Panellists: Loraine Leeson, Tatiana Dos Santos, Jijo Sebastian, Dominic Thorpe, Fiona Whelan
12.30 - 13.30	Lunch
13.30 - 14:30	Keynote address by Suzanne Lacey and book launch
14:30 - 15:00	Tea/coffee break
15:00 - 17:00	Panel Two: <i>'(In)disciplining the Field: Transformations, Interventions and Claim-Making'</i> Panel Chair: Brian Hand Panellists: Array Collective, Jonathan Cummins, Emma Geoghegan, Glenn Loughran, Áine O'Brien
17.00 onwards	Social gathering in Stoneybatter

Keynote Address

**PROFESSOR SUZANNE
LACY**

**UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTHERN
CALIFORNIA**

**Panel One:
Artists' Methodologies:
Collaboration, Ethics and
Relations of Solidarity**

**LORAIN LEESON
TATIANA DOS SANTOS
JIJO SEBASTIAN
DOMINIC THORPE
FIONA WHELAN**

CHAIR: SUZANNE LACY

CHAIR: BRIAN HAND

Guest artist biographies

Array Collective is a group of eleven artists based in Belfast who create collaborative actions in response to socio-political issues affecting Northern Ireland. Situated within a geo-political position that holds complex histories, they employ craic and collaboration as a means of resistance.

In 2021, Array Collective became the first artists from the north of Ireland to win the Turner Prize. Their winning installation, *The Druthaib's Ball*, was acquired in 2022 by National Museums NI. *An Dún*, created in 2024 for Self Determination: A Global Perspective, is part of the IMMA Collection. Commissioned by Rua Red in 2025 following a research and development residency, *The Goose and the Common* exhibition upended the language of protest, surveillance, defence and displacement, and instead invited visitors into a series of spaces where rest, care and collaboration were encouraged.

Array Collective are: Sighle Bhreathnach-Cashell, Sinéad Bhreathnach-Cashell, Jane Butler, Emma Campbell, Alessia Cargnelli, Mitch Conlon, Clodagh Lavelle, Grace McMurray, Stephen Millar, Laura O'Connor and Thomas Wells.

Laura O'Connor is a visual artist and lecturer based in Belfast. Her work explores gendered representations in the media and within cultural narratives through the mediums of performance, sculpture, installation, video and digital media. Recent exhibitions include *pass the baton*, Galway Arts Centre (2025); RUA Annual, Dublin (2024) and *Curating Activism*, UU Belfast (2024). Laura is a member of Turner Prize winning Array Collective. O'Connor is also co-director of WANDA: Feminism and Moving Image, and a lecturer in Foundation Studies Art and Design at Belfast School of Art.

Emma Campbell is 1/11th of the Turner Prize winning Array Collective, whose practice is embedded in queer & feminist art and activism. She makes work that is image-based (photography and collage), participatory, performance-enhanced for affecting change. Emma is also a multi-disciplinary researcher involved in multiple Shared Island projects on Art and Activism, as well as a part-time lecturer in the Photography department, all at Ulster University. Both her PhD and postdoctoral work utilised socially engaged practice as a tool for abortion rights along with Alliance for Choice, where she is co-convenor.

Jonathan Cummins is a lecturer in the Belfast School of Art, Ulster University. He holds a PhD from the Centre for Socially Engaged Practice-Based Research, Technological University Dublin (TUD) and a MFA from University of California Los Angeles (UCLA). His practice, made for gallery and screen, is approached as a process of enquiry and engagement to addresses themes such as ideological belief, political violence, experience of institutions and the challenges of representation, most notably through the inter-connecting film installations *When I Leave These Landings* (2004–9), *Go Home* (2010–13) and *Out the Road* (2012–16). His work has been exhibited, amongst other locations events, at EVA, Limerick (2016); Void, Derry (2013–14); Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane (2013); La Belle Friche de Mai, Marseilles (2013); NCAD Gallery, Dublin (2013); Centre Culturel Irlandais, Paris (2009); and Rencontres Internationales Paris/Berlin/Madrid. He also curates, mostly in partnership with Maolíosa Boyle and has curated exhibitions with artists including Anthony Haughey (2024), Andrei Molodkin (2020), Katrina Palmer (2016), Brian Maguire (2016), Santiago Sierra (2013), Phil Collins (2012), John Gerrard (2011), Hiraki Sawa (2010) and Eija-Liisa Ahtila (2009).

Tatiana Dos Santos is a socially engaged artist, journalist and cultural mediator. She holds an MA in Conflict Resolution, with research focused on de-escalating conflicts through arts and education. As one of the leading artists exploring Brazilian rhythms in Irish dance spaces, her work is deeply influenced by the themes of migration, belonging and decolonisation. She uses dance, talking circles and writing to transcend cultural barriers and promote social cohesion. Her recent projects include the award-winning *Hive City Legacy* (2022) at the Dublin Fringe Festival, the solo show *Threads* (2023–4) with Solo Sirens, together with her collaboration with the ongoing *Welcoming Project* with the Catherine Young Dance Company. Her publications include ‘Everybody is a Dancing Body: Using Dance, Talking Circles, and Empathy to Transcend Cultural and Emotional Barriers’, which was featured in Create’s *Field Notes* (2023).

Emma Geoghegan is Head of Architecture, School of Architecture, Building and Environment, TU Dublin, leading on the undergraduate, postgraduate and professional suite of architecture programmes. She is a PhD candidate researching care, disability and the built environment in the Centre for Socially Engaged Practice Based Research, TU Dublin. A registered RIAI architect and urban designer, she was a partner in collaborative design practice MEME Architecture from 2007–17. Since 2002, her professional practice has focused on the design and delivery of residential, social care and educational buildings for people with a broad range of abilities and needs. In parallel, her research and teaching practice is driven by a commitment to the social purpose of architecture and inclusive design principles. An active member of the professional body for architects, Emma was RIAI Vice President 2020–1, leading on the development of the new RIAI Cultivating Research Scheme, connecting researchers, universities and architectural practices. Actively involved in the arts, locally and nationally, she was Chairperson of Carlow Arts Festival 2014–19, board member and trustee of Arts and Disability Ireland 2019–24 and has been on the board of Visual Ireland since 2021.

Brian Hand is an artist based in rural Carlow, Ireland. He also lectures and is head of sculpture and expanded practice at NCAD, Dublin. Within this department a new MA/MFA in Art and Social Action has emerged. Hand's art practice is broadly concerned with art and politics as well as exploring and researching events/materials/technologies/possibilities from the past. Hand has made temporary public work, publications and time-based installations often in sensitive sites. His most recent exhibition was at the Kunstverein Aughrim in collaboration with Vaari Claffey. As a writer, Hand has published essays for Anne Tallentire, Noel Sheridan, Daphne Wright, Dennis McNulty, Colin Darke, Shirley MacWilliam and Dorothy Cross. His current writing appears in Who Needs Public Art ? on partgo.eu and a self-published short story/lipogram; Town Split in Two (2025). Hand was a founding member of collaborative groups: Blue Funk, The Fire Dept./Pearl Union,147, Entre Chien et Loup and most recently Stormy Petrel/Guaideall.

Suzanne Lacy is a professor at the Roski School of Art and Design at the University of Southern California and a resident artist at 18th Street Arts Center. She is renowned as a pioneer in socially engaged and public performance art. Her installations, videos, and performances deal with sexual violence, rural and urban poverty, incarceration, labor and aging. Lacy's large-scale projects span the globe, including England, Colombia, Ecuador, Spain, Ireland and the US. In 2019 she had a career retrospective at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and at Yerba Buena Art Center. Her work has been reviewed in major periodicals and books and she exhibits in museums across the world. Also known for her writing, Lacy edited *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art* and authored *Leaving Art: Writings on Performance, Politics, and Publics, 1974-2007*.

Loraine Leeson is Professor Emeritus of Art and Social Practice at Middlesex University, London. She is a UK-based visual artist whose focus is the role of art in social and environmental change. She is particularly known for her creative engagement with East London communities from work with health unions and the Docklands Community Poster Project in 1970s/80s to the recent Active Energy with older people, which received the RegenSW Arts and Green Energy award and Times Higher Education award for Knowledge Exchange. Her monograph *Art:Process:Change* draws on forty years of her situated practice to identify methodologies for creative approaches to social transformation.

Glenn Loughran is an artist and lecturer in the School of Art and Design, TU Dublin. From 2015 to 2022, he was programme chair of the BA in Visual Art on Sherkin Island and, in 2020, set up the archipelagic MA Art and Environment in collaboration with Uillinn: West Cork Arts Centre. Key thematic areas of his research and practice include socially engaged art, art and education, artistic research, critical pedagogy, island studies and the philosophy of the event. Glenn's artistic practice is durational, research-led, theoretically informed and grounded in participation, locality and intervention. His educational work is motivated by educational theory, specifically emancipatory traditions of adult education.

Áine O'Brien is an independent curator, cultural producer and researcher who has worked across the arts, education and activism in the US, Ireland and the UK. She was Founder/Director of FOMACS (2007–12), which established a public mediated programme in Ireland, focusing on socially engaged art, migration, advocacy and cultural policy, and Co-Founder/Co-Director of Counterpoints (2012–20), a London-based arts agency foregrounding the intersection of arts, displacement and social change. Recent interdisciplinary, curatorial learning initiatives researched and directed by Áine include: Who are We?, Tate Exchange (2017–2020); Beyond the Now Collective – comprising partners working in locations across Europe and SWANA (2021); Mutual Affinities (commissioned by Creative Scotland, 2022); Art, Migration and the Production of Radical Democratic Citizenship (co-edited with Agnes Czajka, Rowman International, Frontiers of the Political Series, 2022); a Collaborative Incubator Toolkit, comprising commissions with investigative journalists and socially engaged artists and activists (with European Cultural Foundation, 2023); and a ‘Socially Engaged Art and Collaborative Leadership’ programme with Create – National Development Agency for Collaborative Arts, 2024). She currently mentors a range of socially engaged artists who work with and alongside communities of place in the context of the Learning Lab Agency, a cross-sector platform (founded in 2009) supporting cooperative (un)learning, and is Creative Director of the Summer School on Collaborative Practice and Social Change (with Create).

Jijo Sebastian is a self-made collaborative filmmaker from Kerala with more than fifteen years of experience in participatory, collaborative and transcultural filmmaking in community-based contexts. He has co-written, directed and edited ten short films and one tele-film collaborating with individuals, groups and families from the diasporic Indian Keralite community and others in Ireland. His films have been installed in art galleries and screened at national and international film festivals. He was awarded an 'Artist in the Community Award' in 2015 from Create – the Irish national development agency for collaborative arts and an Arts Council of Ireland's 'Next Generation Bursary Award' in 2016, in addition to an 'Arts Participation Bursary' in 2020. In his most recently completed project titled *Salmagundi* (2024), co-commissioned by the Hugh Lane Gallery and Create, Jijo collaborated with a group of more than fifty diverse participants to produce a feature length, intercultural, fictional film while establishing a transcultural community in the process.

Dominic Thorpe is a visual artist who works in performance art as well as drawing, installation, video, photography, relational and contextual based processes. His work frequently engages with the complex areas of trauma, human rights and social justice. In 2022 he was awarded a PhD for research on perpetrator trauma representation within performance art from Ireland and in 2024 completed a commission titled *Dark Dark Mouth* for the Crawford Gallery Cork, exploring perpetrator trauma in the context of the Irish Civil War. Dominic has shown extensively in Ireland and internationally, including at the Tasmanian Museum and Gallery, the Bangkok Cultural Centre, the Michaela Stock Gallery Vienna, the Galway Arts Centre and the Linenhall Arts Centre, Castlebar. His residencies include the Nordic Arts Centre, Fire Station Artists' Studios and he was first resident artist in Humanities at University College Dublin. He has received several awards, including from the Arts Council Ireland and was recipient of the inaugural Crespo Foundation Residency at Uillinn: West Cork Arts Centre. He also has work represented in several public collections and as curator and writer, regularly engages with and supports the practices of artists at the inclusive art studio in KCAT Arts Centre, Kilkenny.

Fiona Whelan is an artist, writer and Programme Leader of the MA/MFA Art and Social Action, National College of Art and Design (NCAD). Her arts practice is committed to exploring and responding to systemic inequalities through long-term collaborations with diverse individuals, groups and organisations. These processes are rooted in complex relational networks and typically accumulate over time through a series of public manifestations, including text-based, visual, performative and dialogical artworks, that take direction from the collaborative process and lived experiences of those involved. Common to all work is an interrogation of multiple power relations, such as those between police and young people; state-run medical services and patients; national housing policy and those experiencing housing injustice; as well as less tangible power relations experienced as social norms related to class and gender. Notable works include *The forest that won't forget* (2024, with John Conway, 221+ and Hometree), *The Apology* (2022, with Feidlim Cannon and Housing Action Now), *What Does He Need?* (since 2018, with Brokentalkers and Rialto Youth Project/RYP) and *Policing Dialogues* (2007–11 with RYP). Fiona is also a committed writer of books, chapters and journal articles focused on the complex relationality, labour, methodology and ethical challenges inherent in her arts practice.

