

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, TU Dublin, Create, Fire Station Artists' Studios and Belfast School of Art, and further supported by NCAD, the symposium accompanying the book launch features a keynote address by internationally acclaimed artist, educator, and writer 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 contributes to a deeper understanding of the complexities and multifaceted landscape of socially engaged art in Ireland.

Schedule

10.00 - 10:30

Welcome by Caroline O'Sullivan, Academic Lead, Culture and Society Research Hub, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, TU Dublin

Introduction by Alan Grossman and Anthony Haughey, Centre for Socially Engaged Practice Based Research, School of Media, TU Dublin

Dedication to Ailbhe Murphy by Helen Carey, Director, National Sculpture Factory, Cork

10.30 - 12:30

Panel 1: 'Artists' Methodologies: Collaboration, Ethics and Relations of Solidarity'

Introduction: Damien McGlynn, Create

Panel Chair: Suzanne Lacy, USC Roski School of Art and Design

Panellists: Loraine Leeson, Tatiana Dos Santos, Jijo Sebastian, Dominic Thorpe, Fiona Whelan

12.30 - 13.30

Lunch (gourmet sandwiches and crisps)

13.30 - 15:30

Panel 2: '(In)disciplining the Field: Transformations, Interventions and Claim-Making'

Introduction: Sara Greavu, Fire Station Artists' Studios

Panel Chair: Brian Hand, NCAD

Panellists: Array Collective (Laura O'Connor and Emma Campbell), Jonathan Cummins, Emma Geoghegan, Glenn Loughran, Áine O'Brien

15:30 - 16:00

Tea/coffee break

16:00 - 17:00

'What Remains? A Question-Led Practice'

Keynote Address, Suzanne Lacy, USC Roski School of Art and Design, Los Angeles

17.00 onwards

Social gathering in Stoneybatter

Symposium Panels 1 and 2: Format and Presentations

In both panels, the Chair will begin with a brief introduction and invite each panellist to make an opening contribution of maximum 5-mins duration, which resonates most strongly with the artist's practice, chapter contribution to book or with relevance to panel title. This will be followed by a moderated conversation and audience participation.

Panel 1:

This first panel explores how artists working in socially engaged, collaborative and community-based contexts develop methodologies that are ethically grounded and responsive to contemporary social, political and cultural conditions. Focusing on methodological processes in completed artworks or those in progress, the discussion examines dialogical relationships and values that underpin socially engaged artistic practice.

Panellists have been asked to address one or more of the questions and thematics listed below which are not considered exhaustive.

Thematic areas of discussion include:

- The various ways in which participatory and collaborative dimensions inform and shape choice of artistic methodology.
- Ethical considerations arising when working with communities, participants or partner organisations.
- How trust, reciprocity and accountability are established and sustained within collaborative projects.
- The distinction between participation and genuine co-creation/production.
- How power relations are negotiated within collaborative artistic processes.
- The role of artists as facilitators, mediators, advocates, organisers or co-creators.
- The challenges and opportunities involved in sustaining long-term relationships with communities and collaborators.
- How solidarity is understood, practised and maintained within artistic work.
- Emerging tensions between institutional expectations, funding structures and community needs.
- Lessons learned from projects that have encountered ethical, practical or political challenges.

Indicative Questions:

- What principles or values guide your collaborative methodology?
- How do you approach questions of authorship, ownership and shared decision-making?
- Can you describe a moment when an ethical challenge reshaped the direction of a project?
- How is 'solidarity' enacted within your practice rather than simply declared or implied?
- How do you navigate differences in power, expertise or access among collaborators?
- What responsibilities do artists have to participants once a project has concluded?
- What have you learned from projects that did not proceed as planned?
- Does longitudinal socially engaged art practice contribute to greater meaningful insight than short-term interventions?

Panel 2:

The second panel explores two inter-connected dimensions of practice for artists working in socially engaged, collaborative and community-based contexts. The first seeks to understand how artists conceptually construct, define and sustain their disciplinary field of enquiry. The second explores the transformative potential of art interventions as responses to shifting social, cultural, economic and political fields in Ireland and beyond.

In probing these themes, what claims might panellists make about their practice and its relevance? Why, for example, does a given approach or intervention matter and what has it contributed to ongoing debates in the field? The answer may be reflected in the adoption of a given methodological framework; the interrogation and amplification of a theoretical construct; situating one's practice in a given location; or indeed working with an underrepresented population, one subjected to discrimination and prejudice. Leading on from this, what role does such claim-making play in progressing or disrupting the ever-emergent field of socially engaged practice.

Thematic areas of discussion include:

- The dynamic range of conceptual influences panellists draw on in constituting their field of practice and its disciplinary reach within and across domains of knowledge.
- The transformative potential of socially engaged art, particularly practices immersed in specific communities and locations.
- The role of claim-making in the conceptualisation, funding and evaluation of art interventions; making and substantiating claims by artists, curators and cultural institutions.
- The overlapping role of research, academic and institutional priorities in the formation and delivery of art interventions.
- The impactful role of writing practice in narrating and translating the aims and objectives of socially engaged art interventions.
- The genesis of an art practice intervention and its evolution; sustaining the participatory/collaborative relationship between constituent members/stakeholders and artist.

Indicative Questions:

- In the conceptualisation and implementation of a given work(s), what is at stake ethically, aesthetically, politically, socially and archivally, or in whatever domain the work is projected to be located?
- How does research and interdisciplinarity inform and critically frame your practice?
- What constitutes meaningful social, cultural or political impact in socially engaged art practice?
- How are claims for SEA substantiated by artists and to what extent are they productively interrogated during and post-project completion; how is the success of a collaborative project beyond conventional artistic outcomes evaluated and by whom?
- How do 'collectivist' approaches to socially engaged art transform the relational/dialogical encounter at the point of engagement, production and dissemination?
- What is the relationship between theory and practice? Is the theory a priori superimposed on the practice or does the theory emerge through the practice?
- What happens to the relational components of the practice when it is translated and relocated into an institutional setting as an exhibition, removed from the site(s) of social engagement and production?
- What contributory role does the written representation of a practice play in translating and substantiating the critical purchase of the project's claim-making? Is there a perceived hierarchy of preferential outlets for such textual reflection (catalogue, journal, book publication).
- What possible tensions and differential expectations emerge between the priorities of academia and professional practice?

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.

Helen Carey is Director of the National Sculpture Factory, Cork. She was formerly Director of Fire Station Artists' Studios (FSAS, 2014–24). Previously Director/Curator at Limerick City Gallery of Art (2002–7) and inaugural Director at Centre Culturel Irlandais, Paris (2002–7) with exhibitions by Michael Warren and Ewa Partum among others, she has curated and delivered exhibitions for FSAS in Galerie Michaela Stock, Vienna. She was curator of the 20th anniversary of the TULCA Festival of Visual Art, Galway. International public art commissions by Carey include works in Bristol by William Pye, among others, and Imogen Stuart in Paris. She was the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs representative for the commission of Eternal Heart by Samuel Stitt in Tushkahoma, Oklahoma (2024) for the Choctaw Nation and Irish Government. Her curated projects further include: 3 Forum: Towards a Methodology for Commemoration (2008–9); Lockout (2013), a multi-exhibition response by contemporary artists to the 1913 Lockout comprising Labour & Lockout, Letter to Lucy and The Market; and The Souvenir Shop by Rita Duffy (2016), an Arts Council major project marking the state commemoration of the 1916 Rising. She is currently a member of the Expert advisory Panel for Culture Ireland. Helen has an MA in Visual Arts Practices (2009) and in International Relations (2022). She is co-editor with Ailbhe Murphy of *TransActions #2: Knowledge and Counter Knowledge in Socially Engaged Art* (2017) and author of *The Arba Minch Art Project: The Evolution of an Art Education Project* (2017). Her research interests include contemporary culture and national identity and cultural influences on counter terrorism approaches.

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. 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 Carlow since 2021.

Sara Greavu is the Director of Fire Station Artists' Studios. She also works independently as a curator, writer and organiser. Projects include We realised the power of it (IMMA, 2024), a research exhibition produced with artist Ciara Phillips and former members of the Derry Film and Video Workshop, which dealt with intertwined political and cultural initiatives in Derry in the 1980s.

Alan Grossman is Director of the Centre for Socially Engaged Practice-Based Research School of Media, TU Dublin. He has a longstanding practice based involvement with the cultural politics of identity, migration and diasporic formations across infra and transnational contexts, ranging from the perspective of the minority Welsh-language resistance movement in Wales to Kurdish refugee music in Scotland. He has published in numerous refereed journals, including *Space and Culture*, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* and *Crossings: Journal of Migration and Culture* and *Journal of Media Practice*, together with delivering keynotes in international conferences across the fields of media, cultural and migration studies, documentary film and visual anthropology. He is co-editor with Áine O'Brien of *Projecting Migration: Transcultural Documentary Practice* (2008, Wallflower/Columbia University Press), a combined book/DVD engaged with questions of mobility and displacement through the analytical prism of creative practice. He has contributed to the expansion of doctoral socially engaged practice-based research in Irish universities, co-authoring with Anthony Haughey a chapter in 'Socially Engaged Practice: A Reflection on Values, Theory and Writing' (2016) in D. Bell (ed.) *Mind the Gap: Working Papers on Practice-Based Doctoral Research in the Creative Arts and Media*, Distiller's Press, Ireland.

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/Guairdeall.

Anthony Haughey is a visual artist and senior lecturer in the School of Media, TU Dublin, where he supervises doctoral students in the Centre for Socially Engaged Practice-Based Research. He was a Senior Research Fellow at the University of Ulster from 2005–8 and head of the Department of Media, Dublin Institute of Technology (2003–5). His interdisciplinary socially engaged art practice utilises activist ethnographic methods as well as photography and video to critically explore power relations and questions of agency in post-conflict and refugee contexts in Ireland and Europe. His artworks have been widely exhibited and collected nationally and internationally by museums and galleries. He was National Museum of Ireland Decade of Centenaries, artist-in-residence (2021–24) and was Creative Places Athy artist-in-residence (2024–25).

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 Uillin: 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.

Damien McGlynn has been Director of Create since 2022 and is responsible for core programming, strategic and organisational development, and national and international partnerships. He is an inaugural Fellow of the Alliance for Socially Engaged Arts. Damien has worked in the cultural sector across Ireland, the UK and Europe for 20 years, with organisations such as Creative Lives, Tate, National Galleries of Scotland, Visual Artists Ireland and Amateo. He was born in Dublin and studied Fine Art at NCAD.

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. 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 Brokentaklers 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.

