In spite of history”: Painfully acquired insights in the corresponding states of Scottish and Irish contemporary art

This item was submitted to Loughborough University’s Institutional Repository by the/an author.

Citation: RICHARDSON, C., 2016. In spite of history”: Painfully acquired insights in the corresponding states of Scottish and Irish contemporary art. The Drouth, 55, pp. 59-73.

Additional Information:

- This paper is published with kind permission of the publisher.

Metadata Record: [https://dspace.lboro.ac.uk/2134/23449](https://dspace.lboro.ac.uk/2134/23449)

Version: Published

Publisher: The Drouth

Rights: This work is made available according to the conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0) licence. Full details of this licence are available at: [https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/)

Please cite the published version.
Is your tesserae really necessary (2014)
Introduction

This article discusses themes of national identity as inhabited by Scottish and Irish critical art-texts, exemplar artworks and art institutional conditions. The article works against an idea of ‘measured difference’ as centric, Ireland and Scotland are European peripheries with shared legacies that present complex narratives of origin and settlement, migration and diaspora. The first of four sections, The Shared Archive, discusses the resources which support research into Scottish and Irish art, particularly extolling national archives, and considers new interpretative methods and their application in Scotland and Irish contemporary art discourses. This continues in the second section, History Makers, which highlights national identity as expressed in Irish and Scottish contemporary art. The third section, Interludes weaves together observations by the Scottish-born author during a number of visits to Ireland. As this article’s polemic is partly informed by the painfully acquired political and economic insights derived from the prelude and aftermath of the 2014 Independence Referendum in Scotland and the catastrophic failure of the ‘Celtic Tiger’ model in Republic of Ireland, the fourth section, Future State?, argues for a renewed cultural policy supporting better living and working conditions of contemporary artists in Scotland by utilising similar research and arguments recently made in Ireland.
The Shared Archive

The new constitutional framework that developed during the weeks leading to the Scottish Independence Referendum 2014 was a profound moment in Scotland’s public discourse. This discourse included Professor Sir Tom Devine’s observation of Scottish research culture and national narratives:

> There has been an enormous increase in a sense of Scottishness and pride in Scottish identity which has itself been sustained by an explosion in Scottish writing and creative arts since the 1980s, especially in relation to my own subject. We now have a proper modern history of Scotland which we didn’t have until as late as the 1970s and 1980s. We now have a clear national narrative sustained by objective and rigorous academic research.¹

As Devine suggested, Scottish artists have been important presences in the strengthening identity of contemporary Scotland. The historiography of Scotland’s post-war arts is becoming convincingly diverse. Scotland’s art history is taught at a number of University art history departments and writing about contemporary Scottish art in art catalogues has been sustained for decades. Much the same and more could be said about Ireland. For instance accessible Irish research such as Bruce Arnold’s Thames and Hudson A Concise History of Irish Art (1969) appeared a generation before Murdo Macdonald’s Scottish Art (2000) from the same popular publishing house. Arnold’s concision also reflected the problem of a nationally defined art. ‘In spite of the temptations to be greedy about individual artists in pinning Irish nationality upon them, my first concern has been with the idea of an Irish art, developing, changing and enriching itself in spite of history’ [my bold] rather than because of it.²

In terms of the developed support for art scholarship in both countries, investment in significant visual cultural resources is at different stages. In the development of its archival resources, post-war Scottish art history lags behind Ireland – as if the idea of a national art reflects its devolved but not independent state.

Meanwhile the National Irish Visual Arts Library (NIVAL) in Dublin has almost achieved its aim in becoming the primary Irish visual art library and to contain all existing books, catalogues, slides and videos of contemporary Irish art. Its art historical complement, the Trinity Irish Art Research Centre (TRIARC), was founded in 2003 in response to international interest in Irish art. These have no exact Scottish counterparts. The Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art’s Library, containing over 50,000 items, is NIVAL’s closest counterpart, however Scottish art’s significant archival resources are dispersed.

Such is the extent of their holdings, NIVAL and TRIARC provide ample source material from which to begin a serious discussion of Scottish art and various publications have implicitly or explicitly discussed this. Looking at modern and contemporary art, Liam Kelly’s Ulster perspective Thinking Long: Contemporary Art in the North of Ireland (1996) was an embedded reading (the author was a curator at The Orpheus Gallery, Belfast, 1986-92 and The Orchard Gallery, Derry, 1996-99) of Ireland’s artworld. Kelly’s appendix of 77 artist’s potted biographies included 6 Scottish artists, 7 English artists as well as 3 Northern Americans, assimilating transnational artists each seemingly inhabited with multiple pasts.

Irish and Scottish art history in the twentieth century enjoyed numerous conversations³, the congruence exemplified by Fintan Cullen and John Morrison’s collection A Shared Legacy: Essays on Irish and Scottish Art and Visual Culture (2005), which included discussions of race, class and union, in their visual cultures. Above all, Cullen and Morrison suggested ‘ways in which the visual operates within the context of two communities with related experiences of lost statehood yet retained nationhood.’⁴

In some respects the current state of Scottish investment in visual-cultural archives is indicative of Devine’s comments regarding the late development of a modern history of Scotland. The absence of a specialist research centre for Scottish Art does not mean the Scottish universities or the museum sector regard Scottish art as a subsidiary theme within British art. A Scottish Art Research Centre would form an important cultural index in support of the study of Scottish art held in resident museum collections, inform their future collecting and conservation, and provide a fructifying source of material for artists and curators to investigate important connections with the historical context
of those who have worked or lived in the same place. In the meantime interpretive and scholarly-informed applied research is underway, respected academics such as Dundee’s Professor of Scottish History of Art (Macdonald), Dr Tom Normand (St. Andrews), Dr Sarah Lowndes (Glasgow School of Art), and Professor Andrew Patrizio (Edinburgh’s Professor of Scottish Visual Culture) retain a critical stance and regularly publish probing research which has been translated as accessible output in the museum and professional sector.

Just as vital, contemporary artistic practice increasingly accesses the Scottish cultural archive, for instance that found in Joanne Tatham and Tom O’Sullivan’s studious reading of artworld mythology and the vagaries of career success. Exhibited during 2014’s multiple venue ‘Generation: 25 Years of Contemporary Art in Scotland’ their Is your tesserae really necessary (2014) was visually absurd. Its absurdity was a ‘Trojan horse’ critique of the ‘Glasgow Miracle’ art-collectivist narrative at work during the last twenty years in Scottish contemporary art. Their qualitative research entailed a careful rereading of journalism which extolled artists collectives in Glasgow since the 1970s, revealing the contingent success of such collectives as a less celebratory narrative, with one telling contrast made between a forgotten group of Glasgow 1970’s muralists with that of the more critically successful group associated with Glasgow’s Turner Prize nominations in the 1990s and 2000s. A practice-based engagement with a Scottish Art Research Centre would underline Arnold’s concept of a national art ‘developing, changing and enriching itself’, working alongside the evidence a national archive would contain of the notable roles held by Scottish artists in modernist and post-modernist international development. An example of these roles, and why such an archive is needed, is the largely forgotten Maryhill-born John McHale (1922 – 78). Founder member of the Institute for Contemporary Art in London, member of the Independent Group, McHale was contestably the originator of the term ‘Pop Art’. Such a Research Centre would operate against the confused historiography of The National Galleries of Scotland’s insistence that ‘Art in Scotland cannot readily be defined with the aid of a series of identifiable and distinct movements […] particularly within modern art of the twentieth century.’

While the historiography of Scottish art is ongoing, some of the Republic of Ireland’s visual art scholars explicit discourse in Irish art during the last two decades have claimed a need for new interpretive methods, including a post-colonialist method.8 Lucy Cotter’s ‘Art Stars and Plasters on the Wounds – Why Have There Been No Great Irish Artists?’ (2005)9 for Third Text argued the whole (Irish) nation must effectively decolonise before meaningful discussion of Irish culture can take place. Cotter’s key point was

given that Irish colonisation involved a deliberate stamping out of all aspects of pre-colonial culture, the ‘national’ could never ‘re-emerge’ in a postcolonial era without a decolonisation process and one involving a thorough deconstruction of ‘Irishness’ and ‘Irish culture’ at the foundations of that nation.10

Cotter revisited Mainie Jellett’s (1897–1944) vision of modern Irish painting, ‘to form a national visual art and […] to lay new foundations by advocating an art which would fuse Celtic and religious sources with a European modernist style of painting’,11 as one initially met with Irish public disinterest but which also held considerable international modernist appeal. Cotter contended the public disinterest in Jellett was indicative of the cultural alienism of Modernism in Ireland, but also a deference in Irish visual art to its international acclaim, which meant Jellett’s artistic validation would only be found elsewhere. Cotter’s argument also provided a comparative context for understanding Scotland’s visual art diaspora – concluding one striking paragraph ‘that subsumption of Irish identity is the price of artistic success in Britain’12 – by referring to Mary J Hickman’s observation that historical assimilation of Irish emigrants in England was based upon ‘strategies of denationalisation’.13 Is it is also possible, as the previous paragraph’s example of John McHale may demonstrate, that the subsumption of Scottish identity had also been the price of artistic success? Ultimately the core problem which Cotter presented was for the future conception of Irish art within the troubled context of its institution’s oversight of the colonised past:
Given its contemporary implications, I would suggest that the potential for any institution to radically advance Irish art rests on its willingness to grapple with Ireland’s colonial past and confront some of the most crucial questions underpinning Irish art history and contemporary practice.¹⁴

Utilising the polemic of Cotter’s argument it is pertinent to raise the comparative absence of a post-colonial debate in Scotland’s visual culture research and in Scotland’s contemporary artworld. In their article ‘Celtic Connections: Colonialism and Culture in Irish-Scottish Modernism’ (2002) Ellen-Raïsa Jackson and Willy Maley looked at ‘how language and identity are figured, forged and fused between two countries that are at once foreign and familiar’,¹⁵ raising the difficulty of a comparative discussion, noting these two cultures are ‘intimately estranged by precisely what ties them together – colonialism’.¹⁶ In Scotland’s Humanities research post-colonialism is vigorously discussed. The cultural importance of Beveridge and Turnbull’s paradigmatic The Eclipse of Scottish Culture: Inferiorism and the Intellectuals (1989) cannot be overstated, however in their essays the authors discussed no artists, nor artworks from any period, films, photographs and other media do not appear, nor any prominent architecture of the modern period. Where they lightly touched upon visual culture it was either as secondary source, for instance Tom Nairn’s discussion of national Kitsch symbols, or in regards to the critical responses to Barbara and Murray Grigor’s 1981 exhibition Scotch Myths (and Murray Grigor’s 1982 film of the same title, which included Robbie Coltrane’s bus driver for the ‘Lochs n Brochs Cruises’ and his description Scotland’s landscape; ‘miles and miles of buggar all’).¹⁷ Beveridge and Turnbull’s later Scotland After Enlightenment: Image and Tradition in Modern Scottish Culture (1997) returned to the philosophical and educational theme of their 1989 publication, supplemented now with a variety of visual reference points such as Mackintosh, The Glasgow Boys, and so on. Their earlier development of Fanon’s concept of inferiorism in a Scottish historical context, and in particular their critique of the Anglicisation of curricula in Scottish Universities, contained no references to Scotland’s art schools and could have included discussion of The Royal Scottish Academy, The National Galleries of Scotland, and Glasgow’s Empire or International Exhibitions during the Twentieth Century. However the strength of Beveridge and Turnbull’s argument was its informed insistence of the specific specialness of Scottish cultural and educational practices, its support for generalism, and the realised threat of its loss within a homogenised British regime.

Taking Jackson and Maley (2002) together with Beveridge and Turnbull (1989), the transposition of Irish strategies of decolonialisation to Scotland would be to ignore the subtle and crucial differences in Irish and Scottish culture and the specificities of Scottish culture. Scottish cultural decolonisation, by its analytical process, could include creativity and imagination, in recognition that the living culture can be colonized too. Of the visual specificities, Murdo Macdonald’s paper ‘Reflections on the Neglect of the Visual Art of the Scottish Gàidhealtachd’, presented at The Scottish Highlands: an Historical Reassessment? (2012),¹⁸ noted that from the outset how its author’s research into visual art which originated and related to the Scottish Gàidhealtachd, showed how its ‘frequent repudiation was indicative of a desire to ignore the visual aspect of an entire culture.’ Macdonald imagined the disregarding voice, ‘there’s really nothing visual to speak of’. Faced with a negation of a region’s visual culture, the manifest problem was that ‘such ignorance is not lack of knowledge per se, but an attitude to such knowledge that classifies it as of little importance, classifies it as something about which it is acceptable to be ignorant.’¹⁹ Macdonald’s analogy was with the historiography of the art of the Indian sub-continent and the view purveyed by colonialists that Indian art was comprised only of borrowings, contrasting this negation with the cultural nationalists who had identified Indian art’s autonomous features.
History Makers

As Cotter and Macdonald demonstrate, an evaluation of the institutional narratives of Irish and Scottish visual art requires new methods. Their testimony of the urgent need for innovative methodologies reflected those identified in James Elkins's inflammatory ‘The State of Irish Art History’ (2003). Elkins pointed to relative absence in the teaching of Irish art history of ‘multiculturalism, representations of gender, forays outside the canon, and explorations of new interpretive methods’. 20 This critique was not convincingly applicable to Irish and Scottish contemporary art where ‘representations of gender’ was evidenced in publications such as Katy Deepwell’s Dialogues: Women Artists from Ireland (2005), including interviews with sixteen contemporary women artists whose work was exhibited in Ireland in the 1990s, resonating with Sarah Lowndes’ 2012 exhibition Studio 58: Women Artists in Glasgow Since WWII, and continued in Sarah Smith’s 2012 article ‘In Celebration of Grassroots and Grass Widows: Women’s Art Collaborations in Glasgow’. 21 Considering the practitioners of these three writer’s projects, some contemporary artists have, by their social stance, demanded new interpretive methods. An exemplar is Cathy Wilkes, her work’s titles included Teenage Mother (2006), We Are Pro Choice (2007) or She’s Pregnant Again (2005), indicative of a gendered social commentary and experience. Born in Belfast but resident in Glasgow since 1985, elements in her work such as a shop-display mannequin or the presence of a urinal in Pool Reflections (2007), are more familiarly anchored in the setting of everyday domestic life. Suspended outwith this, these elements hold uncanny qualities reminiscent of surrealism although her assemblages fragmented order means it appears then disappears and so resists easy stipulation within the conventions of art history or any other history.
While Elkins 2003 article was exclusively focused on Irish art history and clearly intended to catalyse debate within its confrontational foci, for instance noting Irish art history’s ‘wholly necessary emphasis on the various traditions of Irish art and Irish modernism’ alongside its relative dis-engagement with world art, he neglected to discuss Irish art’s complex dislocated identity, an identity that has contributed to the recognized profile of a diasporic Irish culture.

Two of the most prominent diasporic Irish artists Brian O’Doherty and James Coleman have developed distinctive sculptural/live action practices and share an attentiveness to Duchampian visual enigma and tableau vivant. Both have been pivotally positioned in postwar Irish art chronologies while remaining more influential in other spheres. O’Doherty, author of Inside the White Cube (1976/1986), began signing his work under the name ‘Patrick Ireland’ in reaction to the Bloody Sunday killings in Derry in 1972 and continued to practise under this nom de plume until 20th May 2008 when, in recognition of the progress for peace in Ireland, he ceremoniously buried his alter ego at the Irish Museum of Modern Art in Dublin. Brenda Moore-McCann has brought scholarly expertise to the disjointed subject of O’Doherty/Ireland, describing his as ‘one of the unwritten histories of conceptual art’ and he continues to resist easy categorisation; shortlisted for Booker Prize 2000 for The Deposition of Father McGreevy, he lectured on (his own) ‘The Last Portrait of Marcel Duchamp’ (2002) in Karlsruhe’s Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie (ZKM) and became an Honorary Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland in 2003. Noting these seemingly disconnected elements, his is hardly a hybrid literary-visual practice, it is clear for Moore-McCann that O’Doherty/Ireland’s approach to art theory and art practice addresses Lucy Lippard’s lamentation for a paucity of interaction between the cognate disciplines of literature and philosophy as the ‘unfulfilled promise of conceptual art’.

James Coleman’s works similarly have become established within the canon of conceptual art but are often assigned to an awkward periphery. His catalogue and critical essays, published by the Irish Museum of Modern Art (2009), acknowledged the influence of his critically praised video-works, staged performances and projected installations on a later generation of video artists, including the nostalgic solicitudes of Douglas Gordon. The critical contextualisation of Coleman’s work is highly effective when located within Irish historicism. His performance work guaïRE. An Allegory (1985), which took place within Dun Guaire Castle in County Galway, was a means to contest the ‘illusion of communion with the medieval past’ as perpetrated by the Irish heritage industry. Jean Fisher identified how ‘to an extent, Coleman’s early projections paralleled Conceptualism’s self-reflexive preoccupation with the nature of art and its institutions, but unlike Conceptualism they did not ignore art’s relation to the socio-historical sphere’ while Luke Gibbons noted that, while Coleman’s work was normally situated within the tradition of conceptual art, there is a recalibration of its traditions – ‘guaïRE reveals it as deeply informed by its Irish context and situation.’

Fisher and Gibbons’ examination of recalibrated art historical norms within a located artistic approach, particularly a contemporary artist’s investigation of place and it remaking, reappeared in TRIARC’s Director Yvonne Scott’s reading of Jack B. Yeats’ early works as ‘combining a Modernist idiom with local and personal themes to create his own idiosyncratic imagery’. Scott’s syncretic modernism continues in contemporary Irish and Scottish art practices, with Tom Normand recently maintaining Scottish artist’s core condition of modernity recognised ‘that hybrids of the global and the local were not simply a function of geography’. This continues in a number of artists enmeshing of media culture with the processes of historicisation. Representing Scotland in The Venice Biennale 2013, the Dublin-born, Ulster educated, Glasgow postgraduate Duncan Campbell whose Films Bernadette (2008) and Make it new John (2009) reprised key moments in the lives of Irish politician and activist Bernadette Devlin and
the car producer John DeLorean through archival sources to ‘re-imagine the histories and legacies’, effectively memorialised Irish national hubris. In *Bernadette* he unfolded a portrait of a highly articulate but now marginal Irish historic figure. Represented at the centre of tense historic events, and responding to these with her satisfyingly precise powers of reasoning, Devlin remained in film, unlike in life, as a less damaged and easily cherished figure, a galvanising presence. However the film’s ‘unfolding’ nature skews documentary convention, the archival footage opens not with a headline but with filmic scratches, scars and their sonic equivalent, in other words, a patina. In Campbell’s similarly constructed DeLorean portrait *Make it new John*, the subject noted for his great falsifications, he reran modern Irish history by conveying the film-star jet-set presence DeLorean, later revealed as a product of Irish wishful thinking – as imaginatively re-enacted in the film’s rueful conversations between redundant DeLorean factory workers. Campbell has developed a nuanced approach to documentary that takes the cultural archive as starting point, shared with the Scottish filmmaker Luke Fowler’s elliptical works such as *All Divided Selves* (2011) and its subject R.D. Laing. Their films became objectively unbound from their subject as much as such films can be in the ‘documentary’ idiom. A precursor is found in the work of fellow Irish artist Gerard Byrne. Suspicious of traditions and suspicious of images, Byrne’s *Towards a Gestalt Image – Loch Ness & Fact* (2000 – ongoing) is photographic pictorial conventions represented as highly subjective, enabling fiction or hoax. *Loch Ness & Fact* continued Byrne’s earliest contact with Scotland through his participation in the 1991 pan-European exhibition *Windfall ’91* in Glasgow, during which his photographic accounts of heroin-use along the nearby River Clyde via detritus and ephemera were collectively presented as unmarketable traces of social decline and economic recession in a recent European Capital of Culture.
To fix any of the aforementioned artists or exhibitions as purely ‘Irish’ or ‘Scottish’ would be to mischaracterise the trans-nationalism of these artist’s practice. The newspaper overpaintings made by Lisburn-born Tony Swain, who represented Scotland at the 2007 Venice Biennale following his training at The Glasgow School of Art, illustrated murkily uneasy landscapes or pieced together urban references as a register, not so much of the places but of the times we live in. One impact of Irish contemporary artists on the Scottish artistic community has been to partly emphasise cross-nation sharing and movement that sidesteps an increasingly unconvincing unified British art. This fructifying inter-nation relationship has the capacity to refute James Elkins’ previously discussed essay, that ‘art history has developed regional and national strains that are measurably different from one another.’

‘Measuring difference’ is a methodology that is at variance with the nebulous realities found in these ‘shared legacies’, as discussed in Cullen and Morrison (2005). An outstanding exemplar in contemporary art of the shared legacies after the Troubles, between Scotland and Northern Ireland interwoven cultures, was Roderick Buchanan’s Legacy (2011). Buchanan’s video installation energised the effect of two Scottish flute bands actively separately involved in the cultural expression British Loyalism and Irish Republicanism in Northern Ireland. Theirs is a living legacy that grew during and after the Troubles, when bandsmen from Northern Ireland would travel to support Scotland’s parades and vice versa, enabling their shared ideals to develop as fraternal links. Buchanan documented practise rehearsals and highly skilled public parades as intensively practised customs. His editing then represented Loyalism and Republicanism in alternating performance, one group receiving the other in an acquiescent and respectful silence. This had the effect of representing both flute bands as mutually agreed, valid expressions of community.

‘Those folk on the move between shore and shore’ wrote Michael Longley in his poem Leaving Inishmore (1966). During a visit to Ireland, Longley’s evocation of transience and threshold was reminiscent of painting Tony Swain’s Passive with the Idea (2006). In Swain’s subtle work, later exhibited in Interlude – Aspects of Irish Landscape Painting at Dublin’s The Douglas Hyde Gallery, the coast seemed a point of arrival but also evocative of the migration and history of loss which continues to haunt the Irish and Scottish peripheries.
During one periodic visit to the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, how one might reconsider the Republic’s art in the context of existential crisis during a visit to Skibereen in the south-west in 2008, at the time of its bank’s insolvency and bursting of its property value bubble. Skibereen’s community was stoic during the emergence of an economic bailout but the newly built unwanted bungalows, not quite the ‘ghost estates’ photographed by Irish photographer Anthony Haughey elsewhere in Ireland but a blight nonetheless, lay dormant in the surrounding mossy landscape, ‘spectral geographies’ (Maddern and Adey, 2008) of Ireland’s west coast, having soaked up much needed capital. These did not lend themselves to simple comparison with other historical examples resulting from forced migration, such as the wounding Scottish Highland expulsion known as The Clearances. Everything reeked of exhaustion. The economics of history glimpsed during this visit were visually inescapable. Skibereen’s boarded-up shops were a drab herald of the recession that was to impact on the UK’s North and Midlands.

While the documented ghost estates in Anthony Haughey captivate as an abandoned landscape resonant with war photography, this is a rendering of how Ireland’s ‘traces of recent economic prosperity, cultural cosmopolitanism, and particularly property investment are overlaid by the trauma of unemployment, negative equity, and the death of a dream’, wrote Cian O’Callaghan. Even as these future ruins are becoming an exhausted metaphor/metonym and Ireland’s economic collapse had not obviously merged the decay of the present with a grievance of the past, Haughey’s images were of future ruins. To go to Ireland now is to go in to History.

Anthony Haughey ‘Ghost estate 5’ From the series Settlement (2011).
Heather Clark’s article ‘Leaving Barra, Leaving Inishmore’ for *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*, 2009 discusses the formative situation of Michael Longley’s poem, ‘folk on the move’. Clark described how Longley, Louis MacNeice and Derek Mahon were each drawn to Gaelic-speaking islands as writers who sought a cross-community engagement which could transcend tribalism or territorial demands. However Clark contended that their withdrawal to a northern pastoral island was in fact a type of disengagement that was always prone to failure, in effect they became suspended between the points of arrival and departure in an uncertain interlude. No one can abdicate from history, so revealing the failure of their project:

*Embedded, then, in these poets’ seemingly apolitical pastorals is a subtext of engagement versus disengagement, home versus exile. For to live on an island is to disengage oneself from turbulent political, economic and cultural realities; islands beckon as places where one might, as Mahon writes in ‘Rathlin’ be ‘through with history.’ Yet these writers realise, by the end of their island sojourns, that such a hope is a fantasy.*

---

**Paul Henry Landscape (c. 1923) ©2014 [www.crawfordartgallery.ie](http://www.crawfordartgallery.ie)**
After Skibereen, on the eastwards journey along the N71 towards Cork’s Crawford Art Gallery, as if manifesting the unreality of a turbulent economic crisis, entailed swerving into the empty oncoming lane in order to avoid a ‘madra’ standing in the single carriageway. In the Crawford Art Gallery, the coastal scenes of the maritime genre tended to represent economic emigration and the catastrophic famine. Robert Richard Scanlan’s *Emigrants Awaiting Embarkation, West Cork* (1852) has Ireland as an island inhabited by ocean-facing residents with their back to the viewer, in longing and in farewell. Inland imagery included Paul Henry’s *Landscape* (c. 1923), small stacks of bog turf under a cumulus sky. Henry’s later works are often seen met with critical mistrust, he pandered to the growing market for his paintings, and yet this landscape seemingly faithful to an otherwise incidental feature found on the brow of a slope, a homely detail as a reflective space and a landscape of the self.

Later in Dublin, searching for other concurrences of art, history and authenticity, the mood that permeated the English-Irish maritime painter Edwin Hayes’ *An Emigrant Ship, Dublin Bay, Sunset* (1853) in the collection of the National Gallery of Ireland, was easily reproached. The date shares Ireland’s Great Famine but the representation contained little abjuration of the known horrors. Scanlan was no Roger Casement, he would not denounce British policy. The painting is dated the year of Hayes’ move from Dublin to London and represented a type of retreat from the facts. The stance of the depicted boat passengers as they embarked on the chance of a new future was not one that conveyed any of the causes of emigration; eviction, infection and starvation and the urgent need to leave or die. The pale light that fell on the ship’s sails set the scene in a pensive cast however it did so without any sense of urgent flight. Scanlan portrayed a scene of conditional acceptance, and pastoral cycle of nature and seasons and days.

**Future State?**

What was Ireland becoming after 2008? After the implosion of the Celtic Tiger model, battered by the events surrounding the banking collapse, this question informed debate among Irish visual artists as it began to regain its ostensibly prepense state. *The Future State* examined the Irish crisis through a study of visual culture. Originating in an academic and cultural conference at Goldsmiths, University of London (November 2012) this sought an ethical framework for Irish culture as it worked within new global paradigms. The consequences of Ireland’s economic collapse were discussed in other ways, particularly what it means to be Irish at a time of a social unseaming, and not only the symbolism of the ghost estates. For instance, the growing body of literature that discussed filicide in an ROI context and how to investigate it’s underlying causes. The phenomenon predated Ireland’s economic collapse but the frequency of the phenomenon added to the post-collapse soul-searching across a broad constituency.

Feelings were surmised in Joseph O’Conner’s ‘The Irish are angry. We feel frightened, alone and unled’ for The Guardian:

> On Tuesday in Ireland, four children were killed by their fathers. We don’t know why, but it has terrified us. It seems somehow a part of the strange and ferocious trauma we are undergoing, an identity crisis so viral and all-engulfing that we don’t know who we are any more.

While O’Conner’s article provoked images akin to Goya’s *Saturn Devouring His Son* (1819-23), he refused to ameliorate the horror, remarkably, he then marshalled an unconventional means out of the catastrophe, including leadership from within the creative community:

> We have important things now that we will still have then: a generation of tough entrepreneurs; the work of our artists and writers; a beautiful landscape; a supportive diaspora; a painfully acquired insight into what happens when an entire society gets hypnotised by its own wishful thinking.
Ireland’s recent economic collapse was structural and solutions continue to be found in international arrangements predominantly with the United Kingdom. However placing to the fore Ireland’s cultural power and wakened reality has many advantages, and this article concludes surprisingly with proposals in the field of cultural policy, and how Scotland might in future learn from Ireland in this aspect.

Ireland’s population continues to grow at a rate higher than most other European nations, from just under 3 million in the late 1960s to today’s number, reaching 5 million.\(^43\) Growth is mostly in the east and is increasingly urbanised. The population of ROI is currently less than Scotland but more if Northern Ireland is included. As for O’Conner’s upholding of ‘the work of our artists’, how many artists live and work in Ireland is not factually known.\(^44\) There are methods by which accurately deduced numbers of artists, and hence a national baseline, can be defined. Membership of specific artform organisations in Ireland and other sources have previously provided broadly indicative data, as detailed in ground-breaking The Arts Council/An Comhairle Ealaíon and the Arts Council of Northern Ireland’s 2008 Joint Research Project into the Living and Working Conditions of Artists in Ireland: Context Paper. Its conclusions suggested a fourfold increase in numbers of creative practitioners in Ireland (limiting the forms to visual artists and writers) since 1979, from about four hundred to nearly two thousand by 2008.\(^45\) Crucially this was undertaken in the context of an attempt to improve the living and working conditions of artists.

Such basic data is lacking in a Scottish cultural context, even at a local level.\(^46\) Glasgow still does not have adequate ‘records of the artistic and creative outputs and achievements of the cultural sector in the City’, noted John Myerscough in his Glasgow Cultural Statistics Digest (2011).\(^47\) The problem posed by the unknown number of artistic practitioners in both Ireland and Scotland (and their demographic) also means no agreement on the appropriate level of support accorded to creative industries, including visual artists, can be reached or the improvement of their conditions actively politicised. An accurate numerical context would contribute to the argument for the enhanced working conditions, as well as fully establish their economic importance. The thesis of Myerscough’s earlier pioneering study, published in 1988, The Economic Importance of the Arts in Britain, (a prelude to Glasgow’s year as a European Capital of Culture) proposed artists have a recognised role in emerging economics and narratives concerning overcoming decline. This contextual approach has, in a piecemeal fashion, succeeded in Ireland. At the same time such analysis should be managed via an authentically formed semantic, avoiding what Lucy Cotter has warned of in an Irish context, notions of cultural ‘industry’ and audiences as ‘consumers’.\(^48\) Indeed the controversy surrounding the Creative Scotland funding arrangements in 2012 showed how effectively art communities could resist such instrumental manipulation, with artists forcing new policy direction as well as new leadership for Creative Scotland. However the problem here is one of what kind of society do people want and what is art’s role in it?

As research undertaken in England shows (Summerton, 1999)\(^49\) quantifiable knowledge about the people who work within and alongside arts and cultural organisations shows clearly that they receive astonishingly poor levels of income.\(^50\) Artists conditions in a future state entails a discussion of ethics and social justice, not just economics. President Michael D. Higgins, academic, poet, whose earlier cabinet position was Ireland’s Minister for Arts, Culture and the Gaeltacht, made an important speech at the 2015 Aosdána General Assembly which acknowledged the ongoing problem for artists ‘precarious position in terms of the basics of life and participation’. Higgins declared his ‘view that the importance of cultural expenditure, facilitating as it does citizenship and participation in the public space and world, should be regarded as basic for the structure of society’ and ‘a good and democratically structured cultural policy is an essential part of being human.’ Higgins examined this structure in contemporary Ireland, positing an idea that recent cuts to Irish arts funding were indicative of the arts’ peripheral place in Irish society. He argued for a ‘national cultural policy’ in response:
Creativity and culture are about the articulation and vindication of rights, the right for everyone to participate fully in society. They are a social good which, if left to the vagaries of the marketplace, will either fail to survive or become so compromised and distorted that the public good will not be served. It is essential to have a national cultural policy, and to have one that recognises the fundamental role of cultural access in citizenship while respecting the integrity and independence of the personal artistic inspiration. Any balanced discussion about public funding for the arts must derive from that principle, rejecting as a starting point any uninformed populism which sees the arts as a residual, as something we do when we can afford it.

Higgins’ demand for an essential national policy, or Joseph O’Conner’s marshalled cultural resources to support Ireland’s national renewal – ‘Tough entrepreneurs,’ a supportive diaspora, and working artists – both define ‘Irish artists’ and ‘Scottish artists’ as a group of specialists who hold important capital as their countries make their way through economic problems while considering other socio-economic models. Entrepreneurialism alone is not enough.

A claim for Ireland’s tough ‘entrepreneurialism’ are the stacked boxes of Megs Morley’s self-initiated Artist-led Archive – Sustainable Activism and the Embrace of Flux (2006 – ongoing). These include documents from 76 artist-led initiatives in Ireland (North and South) from the 1970’s to the present day, a period marking significant change in Ireland. The archive evidences what sometimes became the leading developments in Ireland’s visual arts, as well as the self-improved circumstances for artists in whichever locale they worked, positively modelling artistic-collectivism as a means to sustain practice in otherwise unpropitious circumstances. It is has been suggested that Irish organisations such as Galway’s 126 Gallery and others throughout Ireland benefit from the theorisation and popularisation of artist-led models. They have sometimes integrated with their better funded partners towards infrastructural developments, for example Galway’s annual TULCA Visual Arts Festival or Galway’s county-wide bid as a European City of Culture in 2020. And yet, Morley’s Artist-led Archive is short on the individual cost to artists of low wages, sporadic access to support and of uncertain career patterns.

It is known that artist’s collectives foster resilience, Noreen Byrne, Bridget Carroll and Michael Ward’s 206 study of seven Irish artist run organisations, ‘Artists’ co-operatives and their potential to contribute to the development of the visual arts sector in Ireland’, highlighted ‘the valiant nature of these organisations’ and their value in terms of gaining skills and gaining career footholds. This is not enough. These collectives, such as 126 Gallery in Galway, partly organised on the constitution and experience of Glasgow’s artist-led Transmission Gallery, and their innovations may await recognition many years ahead, but they are often ‘where the real pulse of the visual arts lies.’ They require greater acknowledgement and higher levels of support. In the dreary context of continuing withdrawal of support for emerging art and artists, recent economic and political events must become, as in the earlier words of Samuel Beckett’s, only the sound of ‘the door closing that was not a door closing’.

The author wishes to thank Dr. Niamh NicGhabhann for her input into a preliminary version of this article.
Endnotes
3 For instance 20th Century Scottish born or trained artists such as William Scott (Scottish-born, Irish trained, English resident) moved residence between Irish and Scottish landscapes (as well as leading a number of English art schools). Scott's paintings in Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane Gallery include Blue and White (1963) are in close proximity to works by Barry Cooke (English-born Irish painter) and Francis Bacon (Irish-born Scottish painter), which refutes any easy national identification in Scottish, English or Irish art.
5 Coined by Swiss curator Hans Ulrich Obrist in 1996, the phrase is regularly dismissed by some of the artists and curators it was intended to celebrate.
6 McBride was an influential writer on technology, mass communications, architecture and design, including R. Buckminster Fuller (1962) and The Ecological Concept (1971).
17 The focus of Nairn and Grigor’s disdain, tartanry and national kitsch, reappeared with great visual effect in Rachel Maclean’s Happy & Glorious exhibition. Three interlaced works A Whole New World (2013), Please, Sir… (2014), and The Lion and The Unicorn (2012) used ‘green screen’ digital backdrops and real locations, including a former hunting residency in the Scottish borders. In this sequence each work was enmeshed with the emblems of British Union, Maclean re-enacted conversations, speeches and arguments made by media and political figures as they argued for and against Scottish Independence. Black oil consumed by the work’s protagonists and one forcefully, or gleefully, plunged a large knife into a cake decorated with the Union Jack.
18 Annual Conference of the Economic and Social History Society of Scotland, Glasgow, September 2012.
19 A later version, which follows up some of the paper’s argument, is published as ‘Finding Scottish Art’, bellacaledonia.org.uk, 16th February 2013 (accessed 25th August, 2015).
30 Duncan Campbell’s representation in Scotland’s Venice Biennale was noted in Scotland’s Culture Minister Fiona Hyslop’s in a speech in 2013. ‘Past, Present & Future: Culture & Heritage in an Independent Scotland’ – ‘the Scotland + Venice Exhibition at the Venice Biennale is represented by artists […] not Scottish by birth but representing this nation by choice’
31 For an excellent articulation of these see http://www.afterall.org/online/artists.at.work.duncan.campbell.in.convversation.with.stuart.comer.
32 Windfall ’91 exhibition has since become narrated as one legacy of Glasgow’s 1990 European Capital of Culture Festival. In reality it hardly benefited from the jamboree nor was such intended. Windfall ’91 was an attempt by Glasgow-based artists to introduce a codified infrastructure for their European counter parts and to expect reciprocity.
34 As this article argues for new interpretative methods in the field, a discussion of the affective setting for creative practitioners in Irish and Scottish art – its public spaces, the origin of cultural practices, the role of artists the remaking of identity in peripheral settings requires – requires site visits, interviews, dialogue and discussion with artists and writers but also the author’s own auto-ethnographic reflections on the landscapes in question, or more particularly by repeated voyaging through these various landscapes (Lorimer & Lund, 2003). This is as much a personal and internal (bodily, diaristic, experiential) journey as it is external and objective, enabling an account of psychological responses resulting from an ‘accretion of embodied experiences’ (Latham, A., ‘Research, performance, and doing human geography: some reflections on the diary-photograph, diary-interview method.’ Environment and Planning A 35, 2003, ps. 1993 – 2017.)
36 The Scottish Gaelic is Fuadach nan Gàidheal, the ‘expulsion of the Gael’ and the forced displacement during the 18th and 19th centuries of a significant number of people from traditional land tenancies in the Scottish Highlands, where they had practised small-scale agriculture, has left a lingering sense that Scotland was and yet still remains colonised, even if the importance of the Clearances in an historical context is contested.


40 For instance see http://www.irishexaminer.com/ireland/mother-leads-campaign-to-prevent-further-cases-of-filicide-241789.html

41 O’Conner, J., 'The Irish are angry. We feel frightened, alone and unled', The Guardian (Friday 19th November, 2010), p. 44.

42 O’Conner, J., (2010), p.44.

43 See http://www.cso.ie/en/

44 And the census classifications in the Republic of Ireland (ROI) or Northern Ireland (NI) do not cover all artforms and related occupational categories within the remit of the Arts Councils.


Section reproduced below: ‘Size of the artist population in Ireland. There is no official agreement on the size of the professional artist population in Ireland. Published census occupational classifications that include artists are too broad. The census classifications in the Republic of Ireland (ROI) or Northern Ireland (NI) do not cover all artforms and related occupational categories within the remit of the Arts Councils. [...] In 1979 it was estimated that the ROI had a professional artist population of 1,451 (Arts Council/An Comhhaire, 1979). This number was based on a range of Membership lists (e.g. Equity, Federation of Music) or names of Arts Council / An Chomhaille Ealaion funded applicants (playwrights, painters, sculptors, authors). Over two-thirds (72%) of this population was considered to be ‘interpreters’ artists (music and drama) and under one-third (28%), approximately 400, was classified as ‘creative’ (painting, sculpture, literature) artists. If this latter group of 400 is comparable with the group claiming artists tax exemption in 2004 (1,970) it would suggest a substantial increase in the number of professional artists over the 25 years.’

46 The growth in volume of grants made a further comparison with the Scottish Arts Council’s visual arts in 1991 – 92 (its 25th anniversary) is informative, that year it made 801 grants for arts funding. In 1967 – 1968 visual arts office made only 110 grants. The increase in its volume of grants is also notable for the increase in its disappointed applicant base. In the early 1980s the number of unsuccessful applications had more than doubled from over ten years earlier, although this figure did not reflect the level of available funding through other sources, including a spectacular growth of local authority funding supplemented by business sponsorship.


50 Summerton has shown that artists work in a variety of contiguous and concurrent roles, sometimes salaried, sometimes with fee-payments, but also often in a ‘voluntary’ manner.


52 Barry O’Leary, Head of Ireland’s Industrial Development Authority recently noted that the cost of prime office space in Dublin, celebrating the end of ‘rip-off Ireland’, now priced at 16 euros per sq foot, in contrast with its pre-recession price of 40 euros per square foot. O’Leary also, for instance, describes his international business travels as a form of national diplomacy and returns to the point that Ireland cannot find solutions to its current crisis through economic strategies alone. McDonald, H., ‘Reviving the Celtic Tiger: the man who sells Ireland to the world’, The Guardian (7th January, 2011), p. 29.

53 For a discussion of this in the contemporary Irish visual arts see Levan, K., ‘Poetics, Politics and Irish Art: Thirteen Questions’ Irish Art Now – From the Poetic to the Political, (London: Merrell Holberton; New York: Independent Curators International, in association with the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin, 1999). Levan raised the positive effects of diaspora in the post-industrial age; dislocation, displacement, migration and diaspora, while not welcome economically and not a strategy for national renewal, are nonetheless triggers to creativity.

54 www.theartistledarchive.com Currently housed in the National Irish Visual Arts Library (NIVAL) in the National College of Art and Design (NCAD) Dublin, as part of their special collections.


56 McCarthy, O., & MacPherson, I., (2006), p.34.

57 McCarthy, O., & MacPherson, I., (2006), p.34.