

BENCHMARK

Visual Art

Introduction:

BENCHMARK is a multifaceted arts and heritage project at the Linenhall Arts Centre, Castlebar in which award-winning writer Mike McCormack worked alongside ten visual artists from Engage Art Studios and ten Mayo writers to explore aspects of bench marks and surveying.

A bench mark is a simple and elegant crows-foot-shaped mark which is carved into stone walls in the built environment all around the country. They were originally created during the 1800s to mark the height above sea level at particular locations and were used by ordnance surveyors to map the terrain.

The artists involved took part in a briefing event with surveyors Marie Byrne and Raymond Healy of Ordnance Survey Ireland, and Siobhan Sexton Conservation Architect at Mayo County Council, as well as carrying out their own research on the theme. The writers worked with Mike McCormack through a series of creative workshops, and the visual artists met regularly to discuss their research and creative progress.

The resulting exhibition features new work by visual artists Maeve Curtis, Noelle Gallagher, Nicola Gunwhy, Nuala Hiney, Eimearjean McCormack, Hilary Morley, Avi Ratnayake, Vicky Smith, Joan Sugrue, Ruby Wallis; and writers Edel Burke, Aisling Keogh, Alice Kinsella, Mike McCormack, Sheila McHugh, Mari Maxwell, Geraldine Mitchell, E. M. Reapy, Ger Reidy, Jean Tuomey, and Anne Walsh Donnelly.

February 2020

BENCHMARK Exhibition, 17 Jan – 15 Feb 2020, Linenhall Arts Centre

BENCHMARK Paper Sculpture Workshop, 1 Feb 2020, Linenhall Arts Centre

BENCHMARK in the Making, Art in Conversation event, 8 Feb 2020, Linenhall Arts Centre

Funding from Creative Ireland Mayo for this project is gratefully acknowledged.

www.thelinenhall.com

Clár Éire Ildánach
Creative Ireland
Programme
2017–2022



The Linenhall
arts centre



LIST OF WORKS

left to right

Title	Medium	Dimensions	Artist	Price
Survey 1	handbound handprinted on caneletto paper	30x22cm	Eimearjean McCormack	€30 ¹
Survey 1	artist's book in solander box handbound handprinted	31x23cm	Eimearjean McCormack	NFS ²
Female Marks of Preservation ³	cork table mat, broken porcelain, acrylic paint, oil paint and cement on the leg of the artist's kitchen table		Vicky Smith	€500
Set your benchmark and determine the height from one woman's level to the next found domestic steam iron, acrylic paint, leather straps, photography and plaster bandage on a tripod			Vicky Smith	€500 ⁴
My bedrock is monumental	domestic mop head, copper pipe, plaster on the leg of artist's kitchen table		Vicky Smith	€500
Celestial Castlebar	mixed media on canvas	40x30cm	Nuala Hiney	€120
Celestial Castlebar	mixed media on canvas board	27x20cm	Nuala Hiney	€80
Celestial Castlebar	mixed media on canvas board	13x10cm	Nuala Hiney	€40
Linenhall	plaster cast	20x14cm	Nuala Hiney	€100
Bridge	plaster cast	16x16cm	Nuala Hiney	€100
Castle Street	plaster cast	12x12cm	Nuala Hiney	€100
Cromwell Point	oil on canvas	70x100cm	Joan Sugrue	€900
I Walked the Land Until I Fell Into the Sky	graphite, fabriano, oak	150x225cm	Maeve Curtis	€800
Sophia	oil and digital print on gesso panel ⁵	30x20cm	Noelle Gallagher	NFS
Churchyard Witness	oil and digital print on canvas on board	30x24cm	Noelle Gallagher	€450
Witness	oil and digital print on gesso panel	35x24cm	Noelle Gallagher	€520
Fluctuating points of reference	analog photograph, archival digital print, fine art matt paper	20x20cm	Ruby Wallis	€250 ⁶
Jagged line	analog photograph, archival digital print, fine art matt paper	20x20cm	Ruby Wallis	€250 ⁷

¹ edition: 1/50, 2/50, 3/50, 4/50, 5/50

² edition: 1/1

³ reference: The art of preservation, Alice Kinsella 2019

⁴ tripod is on loan and not for sale

⁵ photographic element courtesy of Colm Hogan

⁶ editions of 12

⁷ editions of 12

Title	Medium	Dimensions	Artist	Price
Landscape Experiment	digital photograph, archival digital print, fine art matt paper	20x20cm	Ruby Wallis	€250 ⁸
Bridge I	plaster casts	24x18cm	Nuala Hiney	€100
Courthouse	plaster casts	21x14cm	Nuala Hiney	€100
Castle Street I	plaster casts	11x11cm	Nuala Hiney	€100
Survey 1	risograph (set of four)	29x42cm	Eimearjean McCormack	NFS ⁹
Sappers' March	oil on linen	81x 61cm	Noelle Gallagher	€620
Six Inch Mile	six inch to one mile map, paper, soil	9x45x6cm ^[11]	Nicola Gunwhy	NFS
Six Inch Mile	archival digital photographic print II	15x10 cm	Nicola Gunwhy	AP€80
Marked & Mapped	archival digital photographic print I	15x10cm	Nicola Gunwhy	AP€80
Marked & Mapped	archival digital photographic print II	15x10cm	Nicola Gunwhy	AP€80
Six Inch Mile	archival digital photographic print I	12.5cmx15cm	Nicola Gunwhy	AP€80
Marked & Mapped	archival digital photographic print IV	15x12.5cm	Nicola Gunwhy	AP€80
I Walked the Land Until I Fell Into the Sky	oil paint, bamboo, pine	variable	Maeve Curtis	NFS
3 Lords, 2 Developers and a Mercy nun	mixed media on canvas cluster of nine canvases (individual canvases)	variable	Hilary Morley	€1200 €150
Promenade II	cyanotype, invisible thread	21x109cm	Avi Ratnayake	€300
Walk the Dog II	cyanotype, fabric, cotton shirt	variable	Avi Ratnayake	€180

All artworks have been made in response to the Linenhall BENCHMARK project September 2019/January 2020
All selected and exhibiting artists are members of Engage Art Studios | Churchfields | Lower Salthill | Galway |
www.engageartstudios.com

⁸ editions of 12

⁹ editions of 30

ARTIST STATEMENTS & BIOGRAPHIES

EIMEARJEAN McCORMACK responds with *Survey I*, a series of silkscreen and risograph prints that draw inspiration from the open plane of vast natural environments, combining graphic symbolic representations of mapping with an abstract interpretation of place. This work is also accompanied by a hand printed and hand bound publication.

EIMEARJEAN McCORMACK graduated in 2007 with a Masters in Fine Art from the University of the Arts London. In 2016 she completed a second Masters in Graphic Design specializing in publication design projects primarily informed by artists' books and zine culture. She has exhibited extensively throughout Ireland and on an international scale in cities such as New York, San Francisco, Philadelphia, Detroit, Berlin and London.

Recent exhibitions include *Summer Show*, Royal Hibernian Academy, *Print Now*, The Crawford Gallery, *New Prints*, The International Print Center New York, *The Future Is Self-Organized*, Limerick City Gallery of Art, *Tracing my Echo*, Zweigstelle Gallery Berlin and *Kaleid*, The Art Academy London.

Recent Publications: *2016 AN IMAGE OF IRELAND: Contemporary Artists from Ireland*, Imago Mundi, Luciano Benetton Collection.

Collections: The National Gallery of Ireland, OPW, Scott Tallon Walker Architects, The Bank of New York, Dundee Visual Research Centre, The Zuckerman Museum of Art, Georgia, USA.

VICKY SMITH asks the question how would maps look if they showed every variation of woman staying at home with an infant? Here she uses a bench mark located near her studio in Lower Salthill, Galway and the Castlebar Courthouse bench mark to act as markers to develop a new body of work within a framework that focuses on mapping the stay-at-home mother and women in the West of Ireland. *The Art of Preservation* by writer Alice Kinsella has provided an introduction to another woman and mother in Castlebar for the artist to begin this mapping process.

VICKY SMITH is an Irish artist from Galway, IRL. Influenced by the writings of Sylvia Plath, Edna O'Brien and Emilie Pine and drawing on a history of feminist artists and performance in feminist art practice, Smith explores female domesticity as a metaphor for female struggle using film, painting, photography and ceramics and domestic objects as sculptural forms.

Smith founded Galway Arts Education Agency in 2015, a mobile art school and is currently developing a Gallery of Children's Art in Galway city. In 2019 she was appointed Engage Art Studios Education Co-coordinator and designed the activity area for curator Kerry Guinan as part of '*Tactical Magic*', Tulca 2019.

Smith was a recipient of the Artist in School Residency from Galway County Council in 2017 and 2016. She was awarded the Individual artist Award from Galway City Council in 2012, 2014 and 2017. Recent exhibitions include; *Drawing on Don Quixote*, National Opera House, Wexford (Oct); VUE Art Fair, Dublin (Nov 2019); The Olivier Cornet Gallery, Dublin (Jan to Feb 2020); *Hiatus*, members exhibition, 126 Gallery (2019); *PERMISSION* group show, Cuirt International Writers Festival (2019). In 2011 she received her MA in Art in the Contemporary World with honours from the National College of Art & Design Dublin. In 2006-2007 she completed her Diploma in the History of European Painting & Irish Art History, with honours from Trinity College, Dublin. Smith received her MA in Arts Administration and Cultural Policy with honours from Goldsmiths College, University College of London in 2004. In 1999 she successfully achieved her Higher Diploma for Art and Design Teachers and a BA Fine Art Degree in Printmaking with distinction from Crawford College of Art & Design. Vicky Smith is an AGA collective member associate with the Olivier Cornet Gallery, Dublin, Ireland.

NUALA HINEY introduces us to the BENCHMARK project as an exciting journey of discovery of the hidden history of Castlebar. Her research began last September with a briefing and tour of the Castlebar bench marks led by Orla Henihan (Linenhall Arts Centre), Ray Healy and Marie Byrne (Ordnance Survey Ireland) and Regina Sexton (County Architect). The artist undertook additional research at the County Library Castlebar, the Ordnance Survey Headquarters, Phoenix Park and the National Archives Dublin. Field work was also carried out where impressions, drawings and photographs of the town's bench marks were made. This groundwork resulted in the following artwork: celestial mixed media pieces and bench mark plasters casts.

NUALA HINEY is an artist who lives and works in the West of Ireland. She has recently undertaken an MA in Creative Practice in GMIT. The work originates from the documentation of long-distance walks in journal writings, drawings and photography. Her practice uses a variety of media; drawings, watercolours, oil paintings, mixed media, photography and installation.

Hiney's background in archaeology informs the development of the work with considerations such as the passage of time, memory, the transformative nature of pilgrimage and the disconnect between contemporary life and the natural world. Her work is held in private collections in Ireland, Spain and France.

JOAN SUGRUE researched Joseph Maxwell, a private with the Royal Sappers and Miners¹⁰, who drowned in 1840 on Valentia Island, Co Kerry during the execution of his duty on the Ordnance Survey 1. He left behind a wife and four small children. This story of tragedy prompted an exploration of the human side of the Survey. The significance of the Royal Sappers and Miners uniforms and how this would have set them, as the hands of a colonial power, glaringly apart from the local population during the execution of their work was also intriguing. The painting portrays Maxwell as an officer, with oversized epaulettes, changing him into another, almost animal like form. William Goldings' novel *Lord of the Flies* is also brought to mind, where it is the civilized colonisers themselves who descend into primitive savage states.

JOAN SUGRUE is a visual artist based in County Galway, Ireland who graduated in Fine Art (Paint) from CCAM Galway in 2011. She has shown in group exhibitions both internationally in the Siemens Arts Space, Beijing, Oriel Davies Gallery, Wales, Collyer Bristow, Orleans House and Block 336, London, and nationally in Ireland including the Highlanes Gallery, VISUAL Carlow and the RHA. Sugrue's work was selected for the Marmite Prize V 2016 and The Contemporary British Painting Prize 2017. She has been shortlisted for awards including Wexford County Council Emerging Visual Artist Award. Sugrue has been a director of the artist-led gallery, 126 in Galway.

MAEVE CURTIS' response, *I Walked the Land Until I Fell Into the Sky*, is a meditation on rhythm, time and space. It is prompted by the idea of today's geodetic surveyors treading the same paths to bench marks as the Royal Engineers & Miners who mapped the terrain in the 19th century with staves, ribbons and paper. Someday, this year or next, contemporary surveyors will make their final walk to one of these bench marks and take the last measurement above sea level. This moment will mark the move from analogue to digital mapping.

MAEVE CURTIS' art practice is a meditation on the mysteries, metaphysics and meta-politics that hover around imaging technology. A graduate of NUI Galway, she gained a First Class Honours Degree in Fine Art from the Centre for Creative Arts & Media, Galway. Awarded the AIB Graduate of the Year in Paint and Galway City Council Emerging Artist Awards, her work has been selected for numerous juried shows including Claremorris Open, TULCA, Eigse, the Columbia Threadneedle Prize, London, the Pallas Periodical Review, Dublin, CRASH Open, London and the Thames & Hudson, 100 Painters of Tomorrow, London. Her artwork is in private, international collections and in the public collections of Galway City Council and the OPW, for the collection of the President of Ireland. She is also a recipient of a Culture Ireland Travel Award.

¹⁰ History of the Royal Sappers and Miners, Volume 1, 1857, by T.W.J. Connolly

NOELLE GALLAGHER approaches the BENCHMARK project from the perspective of the witness; the bench marks are witnesses to change in our world and to the passage of time. Trees also present as silent observers in her paintings, their branches bare and fractal against the sites that are surveyed. Her process includes making plaster casts of the bench marks in Castlebar, then dipping them in oil paint to use as tools to apply paint to the surface of a canvas. Each sapper had his individual way of chiseling out the stone to leave a mark, and this variety of mark making interests the artist - as a painting's strength often relies on the variety of brush marks on the canvas.

NOELLE GALLAGHER is a visual artist based in Galway. Although primarily a painter, she incorporates photography and film into her practice. Her first short film, *Still Life*, was selected by Dublin International Film Festival, and premiered at the Lighthouse Cinema in 2019. A member of Engage Art Studios, and graduate of GMIT (2011), she recently completed two years of mentoring by painters with Turps Art School, London.

Her paintings have been selected for numerous shows both nationally and internationally, including *PeripheriesOPEN*, *Éigse*, *Cairde* and the *Claremorris Open*. Solo shows include *Silent Rhythm*, Linenhall Arts Centre, (2018) and *Recollect*, Saolta Arts, (2016). She is a recipient of the Emerging Irish Artist Residency Award from the Burren College of Art and 126 Gallery, and Individual Artist Bursaries from Galway County Council.

RUBY WALLIS has been working with photography, attempting to subvert empirical modes of surveillance and mapping. She draws on feminist methodologies working with the close-up and performance to challenge objective, distant framing and imaging of landscape. The artist has been looking at ecological fragments, borders, tidal fluctuations, coastal edges, studying peripheral spaces where the sea meets the land and matter fragments and shifts in form.

*The border is a process, an order, an iteration. It is uneven, performative, aural, porous, shifting, changing, fixed, relative, ubiquitous. The border is a negotiation, a threshold, a liminal, temporal contingent 'space' internalised, multiple, returning.*¹¹

RUBY WALLIS is an artist and educator working with photography in an expanded way. She is a lecturer at the Burren College of Art and holds a Ph.D in art practice from NCAD. In 2019 she was awarded an Individual Artists Award from Galway City Council and Irish Arts Council Bursary Award in 2017. Wallis was an artist resident for The Mothership Projects at Cow House Studios, 2018 and the Irish Museum of Modern Art, 2016 when she was selected for the Belfast Exposed Futures program. She was nominated for the Prix Pictet award in 2014. She exhibits and publishes her work internationally.

¹¹ Hutnyk, J. (2012) *Beyond Borders*. London: Pavements Books, pp.1-4

NICOLA GUNWHY's work takes its lead from the first comprehensive mapping of Ireland which was published in 1846 at a scale of six inches to the mile. It was originally conducted by the military Department of Defence, Ordnance Survey Office to survey the land and implement land taxation. The mapping archives a process of seizing power and taking ownership of land. In contemporary society, power and ownership pervades land, soil, water, air, bodies, forcing the occupation of space to be economically vied for. It annihilates the possibility of uncontested space for bodies to freely inhabit. Gunwhy's sculptural piece takes six inches from the maps and parcels up the land. The photographic series are marked and mapped by dipping into sea water. These works explore colonial ownership, whilst alluding to further implications of imposing boundaries on land, space and bodies.

NICOLA GUNWHY's work is primarily focused on corporeality and identity, with pertinent issues including ownership of power and the political implications of illness, vulnerability and precarity. Her practice is informed by consideration of the historic and social construction of diagnoses; ownership of medical information; equitable access to care and bodily autonomy. Gunwhy is interested in how our identity positions us in the world. Her approach is transdisciplinary and draws upon personal and professional experiences of illness and health care provision.

Gunwhy holds an MA in Creative Practice, a Doctorate in Clinical Psychology and professional membership of Visual Artists Ireland. Her MA thesis subject is *'Women's Experiences of Illness: Reflections on historical legacy, societal perceptions and bodily autonomy.'* Gunwhy's solo exhibition, *Can we ever really see each other?* was presented by Galway International Arts Festival and Galway University Hospitals Arts Trust, 2017. Forthcoming shows include *Liminal Entities* and *the body spills*.

HILARY MORLEY was introduced on the walking tour of Castlebar to a cluster of formidable buildings, not least the old Barracks, 'The Lawn', a 3-storey national school and a curious site at Rock Square, derelict but for the remains of an overgrown garden and shattered tile floor. There were four recorded bench marks in this area in the mid 1800s. Only two survive. Estate letters in NUI Galway, a nun's handwritten history and Mayo Library's photographic archive document a rich history of activity in the triangular piece of land bound by these benchmarks. Having been to convent boarding school herself, Morley was drawn to the story of Castlebar's 'big house' and that curious derelict site, which over several weeks of research, revealed a history all of its own.

The artist would like to acknowledge the assistance of Orla Henihan, Maureen Costello Castlebar Library, Ray Clarke, Margaret Gannon, Johnny Mee, Castlebar Social Services and the 'Old photos of Castlebar' Facebook group.

The Irish 'big house' has had a chequered history. They were occupied by landlords who had gained favour during the Cromwellian invasion of Ireland. Some were burnt or destroyed during the War of Independence, others simply fell into disrepair after the ascendancy ran out of money or left them to an indifferent Irish State. A large proportion, were acquired at low cost by the Catholic Church and so for the majority of the 20th century, religious orders resided in some of the finest 'big houses' in Ireland, converting them into convents, seminaries and boarding schools. Such was the case in Castlebar.

HILARY MORLEY is a mixed-media artist, producing work in paint, digital media and collage. She addresses issues such as 'suburbanisation', feminism, family, myths and tradition and reflects personal experiences in her work, through colourful and reflective representations of people and place; presently and historically. After a career in retail and arts administration, Hilary returned to college and graduated with a BA in Fine Art in 2015 and has her own studio in Galway. She is also a professionally applied art curator, specialising in multi-disciplinary mixed-media shows, Percent for Art and the exhibition of ceramics.

AVI RATNAYAKE's response to the Linenhall BENCHMARK project takes an interactive approach to the making of the work. Using cyanotype chemistry to sensitise a wearable canvas like a T-shirt or sash. The finished product is then produced by walking a route of significance or following a contour map. The work on display was made by walking the length of the promenade in Salthill Galway, which many Galwegians do for leisure, totaling approximately 5.4km in distance. The exposure on display is a product of: body shape and gait, ambient light, weather conditions, directions of movement, time of day, pocket contents and flexibility of the canvas. In essence a long exposure of the journey lasts about an hour.

AVI RATNAYAKE is based in Galway and has been producing digitally manipulated artworks and photography since 2003. He started out in digital photography then moved on to analogue and now uses a combination of both. His work encompasses portraits, landscapes and fine art. Ratnayake touches on the subject of interfaces; meeting points between worlds, cultures, different forces where a truth is revealed such as his portraits of people with vitiligo that portray individuals who are often stigmatised in various societies. Through his explorations, employing mainly analogue and digital photography, he seeks to draw out a narrative of appreciation. Currently Avi has been working on a landscape project exploring the space between a significant length of time and the ephemerals that exist within that time with exposures of up to six months.

ENGAGE ART STUDIOS is dedicated to providing workspace and opportunities to its membership of professional contemporary visual artists. It operates studios both in the heart of Galway City on Francis Street and at its new location at Churchfields, Salthill that provides in addition to studio spaces, a gallery and workshop space.

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Engage Art Studios is supported by the Arts Council of Ireland and Galway City Council.
www.engageartstudios.com

Engage Art Studios | Churchfields | Lower Salthill | Galway | H91 YCW9
Open Thurs to Sat 11 to 4pm or by appointment engageartstudios.com