

WHAT IS **Public Art** **?**





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THE WHAT IS__ IMMA talks series?

There is a growing interest in contemporary art, yet the ideas and theoretical frameworks which inform its practice can be complex and difficult to access. By focusing on a number of key headings, such as conceptual art, installation art and performance art, this series of talks is intended to provide a broad overview of some of the central themes and directions in modern and contemporary art.

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This series represents a response to a number of challenges. Firstly, the inherent problems and contradictions in attempting to outline or summarise the wide-ranging, constantly changing and contested spheres of both art theory and practice, and secondly, the use of summary terms to describe a range of practices, much of which emerged in opposition to such totalising tendencies.

Taking these challenges into account, this talks series offers a range of perspectives, drawing on expertise and experience from lecturers, artists, curators and critical writers, and is neither definitive nor exhaustive. The intention is to provide background and contextual information about the art and artists featured in IMMA's exhibitions and collections in particular, and about Contemporary Art in general, to promote information sharing, and to encourage critical thinking, debate and discussion about art and artists. The talks series addresses aspects of Modern and Contemporary Art, spanning the period from the 1940s to the present.

Each talk is supported by an information booklet which includes a summary, the presenter's essay, a reading list, a glossary of terms and a resources list. This information can also be found on IMMA's website along with more detailed information about artworks and artists featured in IMMA's Collection at www.imma.ie.

WHAT IS Public Art?

introduction

As the national cultural institution responsible for the collection and presentation of Modern and Contemporary Art, the Irish Museum of Modern Art exhibits and collects artworks by established and emerging artists who use media ranging from painting and sculpture to installation, photography, video and performance. IMMA's Collection comprises artworks by Irish and international artists acquired through purchase, donations, loans and commissions. Many artworks have also been acquired through IMMA's Temporary Exhibitions Programme and, on occasion, through IMMA's Artists' Residency Programme. Artworks are displayed in the museum's galleries in the context of temporary exhibitions and can also be available on loan through the museum's National Programme. Some works are also situated in the museum's grounds.

In this introductory text, we provide a brief overview of Public Art. Terms associated with Public Art are indicated in CAPITALS and are elaborated on in the glossary on p. 20. We invited curator and writer Clíodhna Shaffrey to write an essay titled *What is Public Art?* This essay provides an overview of Public Art highlighting some of the critical issues which inform this complex and diverse area of practice. This essay also includes various examples of artists and artworks, some of which are drawn from IMMA's Collection. In doing so we hope to draw attention to the potential of IMMA as a resource for further exploration and consideration of this subject.

what is public art?

PUBLIC ART is a broad term which refers to artworks in any MEDIA created for and sited either temporarily or permanently in public places. Public places are generally associated with external spaces; however, artworks can be situated outside in private spaces, such as shopping malls and private housing developments, or inside in public spaces, such as publically-funded ART MUSEUMS and GALLERIES or hospitals and libraries. Consequently a definition of what constitutes public space is problematic.

Situating artworks in public spaces enables the artwork to engage with a broader public than an art museum or gallery; however, the context in which an artwork is seen can affect audience expectations and responses. The audience encounter with an artwork in an exterior space, such as a public park or beside a motorway, or in an interior space, such as a hospital corridor, may be fleeting and circumstantial. In contrast, the audience encounter with an artwork in an art museum or gallery involves a decision to enter into a space with the expectation of seeing the artwork.



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Public Art involves an artist or artists creating artworks in response to a place. This may involve consideration of the practical issues of situating, performing or presenting an artwork in a public place, such as durability, security, safety, access and visibility. But it may also encompass more complex issues arising from the creation of an artwork informed by, and in response to, the specific conditions of a public place, such as its use, meaning or history. Public Art can take many forms and, in some cases, including Socially-engaged or PARTICIPATORY ART initiatives, it may take no physical form at all, such as a conversation, a performance or an intervention. Public Art can use any medium and may be permanent, temporary or transient. Public Art can be many things: an aesthetic response to a place or context, a means of engaging audiences or local communities, an enhancement of the designed environment, a critique, a dialogue, a distraction or an ornamentation.

Public understanding and expectations of Public Art are shaped by historical precedents for MONUMENTS, MEMORIALS and STATUES, which tend to be large-scale, permanent and figurative. Traditionally made from stone or bronze, these works are usually figurative, celebrating or commemorating key historical military and cultural figures or events. Many of these works still exist in their original sites, contributing to assumptions that Public Art should be figurative, decorative, celebratory or commemorative. In the early twentieth century, more austere and abstract forms of Public Art emerged, particularly in the form of the memorial, replacing earlier figurative and triumphal forms. These forms anticipated, and were informed by, emerging trends towards ABSTRACTION in MODERNIST SCULPTURE, which emphasised consideration of the formal aspects of the artwork separate from its context. Developments in MINIMALISM in the 1960s and '70s, which favoured sculptural forms, contributed to an expanding field of Public Art practice which focused on the material conditions of the artwork, shifting emphasis from representation to experience.

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In keeping with the modernist tradition such artworks were situated in public places, often in conjunction with modernist ARCHITECTURE, but with little consideration of their context. This has been the dominant mode of Public Art practice in Western art in the twentieth century.

During the 1960s and '70s, prompted by social, cultural and political change, new forms of practice, such as ENVIRONMENTAL ART, LAND ART, INSTALLATION ART and SITE-SPECIFIC ART, emerged to challenge the dominance and orthodoxy of modernism. Emphasising a consideration of the relationship of the art object to its context, these new forms of practice presented ways to produce and display artworks outside the museum or gallery space. In some instances, such as Land Art, the SITE can be the artwork.

Similarly, developments across a range of theoretical disciplines, such as FEMINISM, POSTCOLONIAL THEORY, PSYCHOANALYSIS and CRITICAL THEORY challenged modernist assumptions about audience engagement with the artwork, suggesting audiences are shaped by their cultural, social, political and psychological experiences and that these experiences inform their encounter with the artwork. Influenced by this discourse, and drawing on earlier forms of AVANT-GARDE practice, such as DADA, new forms of socially-engaged and ACTIVIST ART practice emerged which subverted the objectification of the artwork and shifted consideration from what the artwork represents to what the artwork communicates. These developments influenced the emergence of new forms of Public Art practice, such as NEW GENRE PUBLIC ART, which encompassed temporary, performative and participative practice.

Recognising the potential for Public Art to engage a broad audience with issues of social cohesion and regeneration, a renewed urban regeneration agenda in the 1970s and '80s resulted in the emergence of a range of schemes and support agencies concerned with the commissioning and installation of Public Art. Publically funded programmes, such as the Works Progress Administration (WPA) in the USA in the 1930s, established a precedent for such regenerative Public Art programmes. Established as part of a larger Depression-era regeneration initiative, the WPA involved the construction of buildings and roads and also the creation of artworks for a broad audience, often involving public participation in the selection and location of the work. Subsequent programmes, such as the *Art in Architecture* programme, and the National Endowment for the Arts' *Art in Public Places* programme, were the forerunners of the more common PER CENT FOR ART scheme, which is now one of the main sources of public funding for commissioning Public Art. Through such Per Cent for Art schemes a percentage of government funding for capital projects can be ringfenced for commissioning artworks.

Many Public Art projects, whether temporary or permanent, are large in scale. This may relate to the physical size of the work, the concept, the ambition, the audience engagement or the duration of the work. The commissioning of Public Art may require substantial funding and resources

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to address matters relating to research, planning, consultation, materials, construction, facilitation, DOCUMENTATION and maintenance. The level of funding required can also influence expectations with regard to the final outcome, where a permanent, large work made in traditional materials, such as stone or bronze, can be understood to represent value for money. Under such circumstances, it can be difficult to secure funding for temporary, non-object based, participatory or experimental work, especially where there is no tangible outcome. Where there are many stakeholders, agencies and public constituencies, the communication process around the commissioning, development and siting or staging of Public Art is considered essential to securing and sustaining support for innovative, experimental and challenging practice. The role of intermediaries, such as Local Authority Public Art Officers and independent Public Art agencies, can play an important part in supporting the artistic autonomy of a Public Art commission and in promoting experimentation and innovation.

Contemporary Public Art may be commissioned through the Per Cent for Art Scheme by a Government Department, a publically-funded agency, such as an Arts Council, a Local Authority or a transport or healthcare provider or, in some cases, in the context of a public-private partnership. Public Art is also commissioned by privately-funded agencies, such as a business or housing development. Similarly, there are a number of independent agencies, such as Artangel in the UK, SKOR in the Netherlands and the Public Art Fund in New York, which function as intermediaries, providing support and practical input, in the form of administration, advocacy, mediation, public relations, documentation and funding. These agencies seek funding from a range of public and private sources and tend to prioritise support for the artist's intentions and the artistic outcome.

In the twenty-first century, the art museum and gallery continue to play an important role in the display and consideration of Contemporary Art, but the expanded field of arts practice and the emergence of alternative fora, such as BIENNIALS, ART FAIRS, ARTIST-LED and COLLABORATIVE ART initiatives, have contributed to an increasing volume and variety of art situated in internal and external public places. Concepts of public and private continue to be contested and debated and Public Art contributes to that debate by pushing out the boundaries of what is possible in terms of arts practice and audience experience. Facilitation, information provision and opportunities for reflection are considered essential for further development and expansion of this area of practice.

For bibliography and further reading see page 19.

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What is Public Art? [Clíodhna Shaffrey](#)

- I One of the dilemmas of public art has been the difficulty in offering any clear or shared definition. We might say simply that it is art that happens outside of the gallery or museum, but implicit in this definition is the assumption that public art exists outside the mainstream of contemporary arts practice, or at least is secondary to what goes on in the main spaces and, as such, it has lacked a certain credibility as a fine art discipline. The lack of a clear definition is perhaps one of the greatest obstacles for public art and yet, as Cameron Cartier points out “a clear definition is elusive because public art is simply difficult to define”!

Part of what makes public art practice so difficult to define is that it encompasses a vast umbrella of practices and forms: from permanent sculptures to temporary artworks; political activism; socially-engaged practices; monuments; memorials; community-based projects; off-site museum and gallery programmes; earthworks and land art; site-specific work; street furniture, urban design, and architectural decoration have all been classified under public art. Some argue that categorising public art is misleading – public art is just art. Certainly we see more and more how the distinction between an artist’s studio practice and one that is publically motivated (i.e. political, social, situational, or relational) has blurred and there is considerable fluidity in how an artist’s work resonates within the gallery, art fair, biennial and public project contexts. (Think, for example, of Martin Creed’s *Work No. 850*, 2008, with athletes timed to run as fast as they can, one at a time through the Duveen Hall, Tate Britain; or Francis Alÿs’ *When Faith Moves Mountains*, 2002 – a performative work in Lima Peru, involving 500 volunteers who with shovels moved a sand dune a few inches – land art for the landless.)

What we consider today as public art has been around since the beginnings of art – the Paleolithic cave paintings, such as those at Lascaux, France (no longer accessible to the public) or the frescoes and religious art from the medieval era that spoke to a ‘community of interest’ about hell, salvation and the divinity of God; or the tradition of monuments and memorials increasingly evident in cities and towns since the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries amplifying battle and death and noble heroes. Yet the term Public Art is relatively new. It was coined in the late 1960s in the USA and UK and associated with government *Per Cent for Art* programmes (introduced in Ireland in 1987), which provide funds for

a public artwork linked to capital development – urban regeneration, new roads, social housing, public buildings – and until the last decade involved the commissioning of mostly permanent, site-specific sculpture. Around the same time – the late 1960s and '70s – vanguardist artists in the USA, such as Robert Smithson, Richard Serra, Christo, Mary Miss, Nancy Holt, Walter de Maria and Bruce Nauman, consciously broke from the constraints of the gallery and began producing interventions into the landscape and architecture. The art they made – termed invariably site-specific, earthworks, land art or environmental art – was inseparable from their (non-art) surroundings, creating a very different kind of viewing experience. Walter de Maria's *Lightening Field*, 1977, for example, is conceived to be experienced over an extended period of time and involves an overnight stay at the remote site in Western New Mexico. Art historian Rosalind Krauss, keen to map this rupture with high modernism's formalism, recognised the need for a new terminology for sculpture that had moved off the pedestal, into the gallery and out into the environment, titling her influential essay 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field'. In this essay she draws on the Klein technique to articulate new boundaries of aesthetics that move towards the limits of postmodernism's formlessness.² This 'loosening out' of art's limits has, since the 1970s, generated new categories of (public) art that operate within ever expanding and interdisciplinary fields.

Spiral Jetty by Robert Smithson, constructed in 1970, is perhaps the best known of these land works and has taken on a mythic status due to its disappearance a few years after it was built, submerging under high level lake water, only to re-emerge in the droughts of 2004. It is a massive spiral earthwork at Rozel Point in Utah, USA, that curves its way out into the lake; a great swirl of basalt and soil that redefines the landscape it inhabits with its juxtaposition of industrialism and beauty, decay and rebirth, rot and permanence. It was, writes Lynne Cooke, curator of the Dia Art Foundation, New York, "the sense of ruined and abandoned hopes that interested [Smithson]".³ He was concerned with 'entropy' or energy drain (the reverse of evolution) and saw the future, like Vladimir Nabokov, as obsolete in reserve. Jane Rendell suggests that the distance (and remoteness) we have from many of these earthworks today, such as *Spiral Jetty*, allows them to resonate in more speculative ways and they take on a sort of heroic quality or site of pilgrimage, as suggested in Tacita Dean's journey to find the jetty recorded in her 1997 work *Trying to find the Spiral Jetty*.⁴ The British artist Robert Long's strategies for art made by walking in the landscape operate in a similar vein of remoteness and pilgrimage, going out into the 'middle of nowhere'. His works are concerned with the relationship between time, distance, geography and measurement, and so walking as a form has enabled him to explore these ideas, while simultaneously extending the boundaries of sculpture – walking becomes art. (Walking is a practice, which other artists such as Francis Alÿs use, but for Alÿs it is principally the city that is his site, studio and readymade.) Questions of monumentality and transience are present in Long's work: stones are used as markers of time or distance, or exist as parts of huge, anonymous sculptures in remote landscapes and his walks are exhibited afterwards in galleries through

maps, photographs, texts and floor sculptures. Long's work in IMMA's collection, *Kilkenny Landscape Circle*, 1991, is a stone circle, an artwork that we might feel resembles the ancient field monuments. Long writes, "I consider my landscape sculptures inhabit the rich territory between two ideological positions, namely that of making 'monuments' or conversely, of 'leaving only footprints'".⁵

Questions of permanence and ephemerality are major themes in public art, and histories and memories find expression in the built environment – but whose history and whose memories are recorded and can the monument always maintain its original meaning and purpose? "There is nothing in this world as invisible as a monument" writes Austrian historian Robert Musil.⁶ How many, for example, would instantly recognise the four angels at the foot of John Henry Foley's Daniel O'Connell Monument, 1882, at the riverside of Dublin's O'Connell Street, as representing the four provinces of Ireland? While historic, artistic and literary figures, and famous dead pop stars, sports people and popular local heroes find their way onto our streets and squares, to sit alongside the dead heroes and triumphal arches and public sculptures, they usually take on traditional – generic and heroic – aspects of monumentality. But many contemporary artists have found other ways of remembering, both using and subverting the monument as a means in which to readdress everyday and political issues or to disrupt a sense of familiarity, as Rachel Whiteread achieved in her 1993 work *House*, by casting in concrete a soon-to-be-demolished house in East London, turning inside space out. And, John Byrne's *Misneach* (Courage), 2010, situated in Ballymun, Dublin – an equestrian statue of a girl on a horse – which shows how an everyday person (a young local girl) can be as much a hero as the celebrated public figure.

The meaning these public artworks will have for a particular public and how the public experiences the work becomes a central concern of the artist. Maya Lin's *Vietnam Veterans Memorial*, 1982, in Washington, is the opposite of the traditional overpowering monument – authoritarian, vertical, phallic. It succeeds, as Tom Finkelpearl suggests, in being both abstract and personal – it does not include an image of the dead, but instead names them (naming has been used in many other memorials since, such as the *AIDS Memorial Quilt* begun in California in 1987 and which still continues today, now the biggest community arts project in the world). The *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* is anti-monumental, anti-heroic, intimate. It includes the viewer as participant in the work in a very physical way. It is, says Lin, made for a "one-to-one experience".⁷ Conversely, Christo and Jeanne-Claude's 'Wrappings', such as *Running Fence*, California, 1973, or *Wrapped Coast*, Little Bay, Australia, 1969, (made with the aid of 130 workers who devoted 17,000 work hours) might also be considered as monuments. The 'Wrappings' offer new ways of seeing the familiar, but only for a short time (like an event), giving them an almost legendary character. Visually impressive and monumental in ambition, scale and execution they perform as spectacles. Nearly five million people saw the *Wrapped Reichstag* in Berlin, in 1995. But most of us will only know the works through photographs and recorded documents. Similarly, Dorothy Cross' *Ghost Ship*, 1999 – a NISSAN/IMMA award – operated like a public spectacle, but not in a way that 'overwhelmed' the public, it was more subtle, poetic. Conceived as a homage to the lightships around the coast of Ireland, which were being

decommissioned in favour of automation, Cross' decommissioned lightship (a found object), was painted in phosphorous paint and with a UV light timed to fade and glow; the obsolete vessel made visible at night in repetitive sequences of appearance and disappearance. Moored off Scotsman's Bay, Dun Laoghaire for three weeks, it demonstrated, like Christo's 'Wrappings', how the impact of temporary public artworks can powerfully resonate long after the work is complete.

The focus on everyday life, 'ordinary people' and ordinary things and the influences of popular culture on 'high art' originating in historical avant-garde strategies to bring art and life closer, are all evident in the work of German artist Stephan Balkenhol. *Large Head*, 1991, is an everyman (an individual). It sits on a simple table - carved, craggy and cracked. Ordinary rather than idealised, and anonymous rather than heroic, his works represent the familiar strangers that occupy our everyday lives.

Julian Opie's life-size walking figures (Sara, Jack, Julian and Suzanne), displayed on the central mall of O'Connell Street, Dublin, walking in the direction of the Hugh Lane Gallery, and mounted on LED screens, use sophisticated computer technology to represent real people as simple outline reductions. They were commissioned by the Hugh Lane Gallery who have successfully used O'Connell Street as a very public platform to connect people to the gallery by using public art that is both immediate (accessible) and 'sophisticated'. Barry Flanagan's exhibition of giant bronze hares, for example, was also displayed here. These public works displayed as exhibitions, which are generally for several months, build impact over time, but unlike permanent works seem somehow less threatening for the public and give greater scope for risk taking and experimentation. The successful 'Fourth Plinth' in London makes a space amongst the monuments of Trafalgar Square for temporary public artworks by high profile artists that capture a large audience and include the people's voice as part of the selection process, through comments on a website. The range of work seen and experienced here is considerable - think, for example, of Mark Quinn's *Alison Lapper Pregnant*, 2004, a sublime work in white marble of the disabled artist when she was eight months pregnant, or of Antony Gormley's *One and Other*, 2009, a participatory democratic work that gave 2,400 people the chance to spend an hour alone on the Trafalgar Square plinth (many used the occasion to hold up banners supporting charities or protesting).

- II If defining Public Art is testing, it might nonetheless be helpful to suggest a few things central to the way a public artwork is likely to be considered today. Firstly, the majority of public artworks result from a public commission often requiring a competitive process, long-term planning, consultation and approval (that said, increasingly public art projects are artist-led, or involve a direct invitation by public art agencies that promote more avant-gardist approaches, such as Artangel, UK or Creative Time, USA). Secondly, there is an emphasis on the public and audience and the relationship the artwork will have with, and for, the people for whom it is made. Thirdly, the situation - to create artworks



in 'real' or virtual places (outside of designated art spaces) – makes context a vital element in how the artwork is conceived, created, located, understood and even authored. It is within this triangulation of the artist, the situation (context, place, site, and commissioning body), and public (audience, participant, collaborators, people) that the public artwork gets made, and we might add negotiated, diluted, compromised, and received.

The tendencies for many commissioned artworks, such as those funded under the *Per Cent for Art* scheme has been to promote the 'usefulness' of art – be that to fill the 'social bond', create visual coherence of a city or transform the image of a public body. How successful art can be in performing these functions is wide open to debate. An advocacy of the non-contentious and the universal benefits of the art commissioned for the general public or promoting coherency of the public sphere, has resulted in the blandness of many public artworks we see in towns, along motorways and in front of corporate buildings. The emphasis on socially-engaged processes and participatory practices is widely embraced as a means of broadening access to the arts through greater social inclusiveness. However, as Claire Bishop points out, governments often compensate for social exclusion through socially inclusive strategies, meanwhile the structural inequalities of society remain uninterrogated.⁸

How the public will receive the artwork that they might feel is 'foisted' upon them is indeterminable. *Still Falling*, 1991, a work in IMMA's collection by Antony Gormley, whose figurative sculpture is generally made from casts of his own body, attempts to treat the body not as an object but as a place. Gormley has made some of the best known public artworks and has been invited as a high-profile artist to make work in many cities across the world and also at remote sites – on top of skyscrapers, in the sea and on mountain ranges. His most famous work is the iconic *Angel of the North*, 1995, which won the hearts of local people only after the replica Alan Shearer shirt was thrown over it by a Newcastle supporter. But not all his works have received the same positive response. For example, his three cruciform cast iron men made for Derry City were attacked and graffitied. Malcolm Miles, writing about this commission, asks how can the metaphor Gormley set up, "to put his body between the two sides to create a poultice to draw the poison from the wounds of Derry", carry the burden of these referenced histories?⁹

It was Richard Serra's *Tilted Arc*, 1981, which arguably presented the single most divisive moment in the history of public art. Commissioned for Federal Plaza, New York, the giant Corten steel sculpture was conceived to work in "opposition to the context" – Serra was not "interested in art as an affirmation or complicity" and disdained the need for art to please its audience.¹⁰ The sculpture drew a negative response from the workers, fuelled, many have said, by two judges which eventually led to a court case and the removal of *Tilted Arc*. What the art world saw as "a great avant-garde masterpiece" was, for the people who worked beside it, "enormous and threatening".¹¹ *Tilted Arc* is a fascinating case study, with the ripple effect of asking how a public artwork is to (or should) engage its public?

The critique of 'heavy metal' public sculptures and the removal of *Tilted Arc* marked, as Miwon Kwon comments, the transition to more discursive models of public art – the shift in which 'site' is displaced by notions of 'audience', a particular social 'issue' and most commonly a 'community' and dialogue, becomes a central ingredient in the work.¹² Suzanne Lacy termed this New Genre Public Art, in 1995, where she distinguished a new form of public art practice that is not about the object but is based on the relationship between the space and the audience. She was influenced by Lucy Lippard's *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972*, which focused on ideas, gestures and processes (labelled conceptual art). Lawrence Weiner's *Water & Sand + Sticks and Stones*, 1991, at the entrance to IMMA, is a conceptual work that sees language as sculpture, where an ambiguity lies between the artwork as gesture and the statement describing the gesture.

The desire for a more compassionate identity and deeper engagement with people also found expression in the writing of Grant Kester, whose dialogical aesthetic draws on the philosophies of Jürgen Habermas and Jean-François Lyotard, to present a very different image of the artist, "one defined in terms of open-ness, of listening and a willingness to accept dependence and intersubjective vulnerability".¹³ Nicolas Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics*, written in 1998, drew attention to contemporary arts practice that took its point of departure from the whole of human relations and their social contexts. Such highly influential texts encourage more socially conscious approaches to arts practice, where artists work closely with people or in collaboration with people, often embedding themselves within the context where they work. Mierle Laderman Ukeles' *Touch Sanitation*, 1978-1993, is an early example of New Genre Public Art where, through a self-initiated residency in the New York sanitation department, she began her work by shaking hands with the 8,500 sanitation workers – from street sweepers to managers. The handshake was the start of the 'getting to know' and, with each gesture she would express her thanks for "keeping New York City alive". Rick Lowe's *Project Row Houses* in Houston, Texas, 1994 – a major self-initiated project involving considerable negotiation in the renovation of a row of vernacular shotgun houses to transform them into homes for single mothers as well as project spaces for African American artists (of whom he was one) – came from the artist's desire "not only to put the work in the community, but also to become part of the community".¹⁴ *What's the Story Collective* – an ongoing project set up in 2008, led by artist Fiona Whelan – builds a dialogical practice based on a set of horizontal working relationships with the young people of Rialto Youth Project, Dublin. Investigating power relationships, the project built on the gathering and sharing of personal stories through different forms, including intimate readings with invited audiences. The main focus has been on the young people's sense of powerlessness with the Gardaí, who have in turn been included in the process, which is to inform a ground-breaking new training scheme for the Gardaí, based on the content of findings. The art made is primarily performative, where the subject is about real people living in real situations. The level of personal commitment given by such artists to these particular situations stems from a desire to make a difference (to

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offer the promise of a better world) and their practices, politically motivated, often offer new aesthetic forms that represent a counter-argument to more bureaucratic programmes of social inclusion. Nevertheless, a challenge for much socially-engaged public art practice is how to critique and evaluate it as art. The emphasis on empathy and ethics places less value on the aesthetic and political impact, crucial, as Claire Bishop argues, to critically discussing and analysing the work as art. She seeks “shock, discomfort, or frustration – along with absurdity, eccentricity, doubt or sheer pleasure, as crucial to a work’s aesthetic and political impact.”¹⁵ Bishop cites Jeremy Dellar’s *Battle of Orgreave*, 2002, as an exemplary work that deals with an industrial dispute (the 1984 miner’s strike), but in a way that mixes the political narrative with eccentric middle class weekend leisure (the historical re-enactment societies). For Bishop, Dellar’s work dismantled any form of sentimentality of class unity and suggests that “the whole event could be understood as contemporary history painting, one in which representation is collapsed with real-time re-enactment”. Seamus Nolan’s *Hotel Ballymun*, 2007, commissioned by the forward-thinking Breaking Ground Per Cent for Art Programme 2002-2010, presents a particularly special and distinctive project. Nolan organised the process around a collaborative relationship with local people helping him to design and build a fantasy space, through salvaging and re-imaging objects, furniture and items from the flats, to create a real hotel, on top of a soon-to-be-demolished tower block. The hotel was a functioning micro-society with bedrooms, a gallery, music venue, conference centre and garden. The surreal and utopian experience (people could stay the night) became a springboard, as Mark Garry writes, for contentious opinions that “slipped into negative clichés about the practice of socially-engaged art in working class areas”.¹⁶ But in this way, this extraordinary work offered what Garry suggests, “a mechanism to question the position contemporary art holds within the capitalist model, encouraging a possible rethinking of the possible social function of art”.¹⁷

The influence of spatial theory, such as the writings of Henri Lefebvre (*The Production of Space*), Michel de Certeau (*The Practice of Everyday Life*) and Doreen Massey, who argue for a more nuanced and complex understanding of place as unfixed, contested and multiple, is reflected also in the writings of Simon Sheikh, who speaks of the fragmentation of the public sphere, which we do not enter into equally as a common shared space. And just as there is no unified public sphere, there is, he argues, no idealised or generalised public. The meaning of a public artwork will shift in relation to space, contexts and publics (an individual spectator brings his unique experiences – inclusive of age, class, gender, background – to the particular situation or art experience). Such a shift in understanding, according to Sheikh, suggests a different notion of communicative possibilities and methods for the artwork, that take their point of departure from different fields or disciplines, or a specific rather than general public, or a particular context or site.¹⁸

On the Irish public art website – publicart.ie – there are numerous examples that demonstrate the many directions (and forms) that public art is taking in Ireland and internationally. The possibilities within this relatively young movement to present unique opportunities to explore the multifold realities of the contemporary world, surely must make this a credible fine art discipline?

- 1 Cameron Cartiere, ‘Coming in from the Cold, A Public Art History’, in Cameron Cartiere and Shelly Willis (eds.), *The Practice of Public Art*, London/New York: Routledge, 2008, p. 3.
- 2 Rosalind Krauss, examining the changing dynamics of sculpture in her now-famous essay, developed the expanded field model in 1979, which is based on a series of exclusions through a binary model of architecture, not landscape and landscape not architecture. Continuing a logical expansion of these sets of binaries, the model is transformed into a quaternary field to mirror the original opposition and includes Site Construction, Marked Site, Sculpture, and Axiomatic structure.
- 3 See <http://www.diaart.org>
- 4 Jane Rendell, ‘Space, Place, and Site in Critical Spatial Arts Practice’, in Cameron Cartiere and Shelly Willis (eds.), *The Practice of Public Art*, London/New York: Routledge, 2008, p. 36.
- 5 See <http://www.richardlong.org>
- 6 Robert Musil, *Monuments: Posthumous Papers of a Living Author*, trans. Peter Wortsman, Hygiene: Eridanos Press, 1987.
- 7 Tom Finkelpearl, *Dialogues in Public Art*, Interview with Maya Lin, Cambridge, MA/London: MIT Press, 2000, pp. 117-121.
- 8 Claire Bishop, ‘The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents’, in *Artforum*, February 2006. Also see http://www.publicart.ie/en/main/criticalcontexts/writing/archive/writing/view//422b08b059/?tx_pawritings_uid=4
- 9 Malcolm Miles, ‘Critical Spaces: Monuments and Change’, in Cameron Cartiere and Shelly Willis (eds.), *The Practice of Public Art*, London/New York: Routledge, 2008, pp. 67-68.
- 10 Tom Finkelpearl, *Dialogues in Public Art*, Interview with Douglas Crimp on *Tilted Arc*, p. 61. (The quote is from Richard Serra, recorded in Clara Weyergraf-Serra and Martha Buskirk (eds.), *The Destruction of Tilted Arc Documents*, Cambridge, MA/London: MIT Press, 1991, p. 13.)
- 11 Douglas Crimp recounting William Rubin (Director of Painting and Sculpture at MoMA) who suggested at the testimony that all the great avant-garde masterpieces that were opposed in their historical moment ... eventually everybody would come to see that this is a great work of art. See Tom Finkelpearl’s *Dialogues in Public Art*, Interview with Douglas Crimp on *Tilted Arc*, p. 71.
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cliódhna
shaffrey

cliódhna shaffrey is a curator whose practice includes exhibitions, writing, public art commissions, arts policy and longer-term research projects, such as 'artist-as-traveller', 'TAADE' (Leitrim and roscommon) and 'body city' (publin docklands). Her most recent project 'unbuilding' is a collaborative curatorial initiative, developed out of a residency with wicklow county council. she is co-editor of publicart.ie (with sarah searson).

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ABSTRACTION

The process of making abstract through elimination or avoidance of any representational elements and by emphasising the formal elements of an artwork.

ACTIVIST ART

Arts practice which employs collective action in the public domain, such as demonstrations, protests, banners, signs and leaflet distribution, informed by issues of political or social injustice.

ARCHITECTURE

The discipline concerned with the planning, design and construction of the built environment in terms of its aesthetic, functional and social considerations.

ART FAIR

An event, usually held annually, to network, showcase, market and sell art. Art Fairs have become an important mechanism in the art market for Modern and Contemporary Art. Notable examples include Frieze, ARCO and ArtBasel.

ARTIST-LED INITIATIVES

Projects or organisations, such as studios or galleries, set up and run by artists, often on a collective or cooperative basis.

ART MUSEUM

A venue for the collection, preservation, study, interpretation and display of significant cultural objects and artworks.

AVANT-GARDE

French for advance guard or 'vanguard', a military term to describe an advance army group. The term is used to describe innovative, experimental or cutting edge artists and movements.

BIENNIAL

A large-scale exhibition of international Contemporary Art hosted by many cities every two years. The Venice Biennale was the forerunner of what is now a dominant trend in exhibiting Contemporary Art.

COLLABORATION / COLLABORATIVE ART

A form of arts practice where two or more artists, often from different disciplines, collaborate in the creation of an artwork.

CRITICAL THEORY

A range of theories, drawn mainly from the social sciences and humanities, and associated with the Frankfurt School, which adopt a critical approach to understanding society and culture.

DADA

An international, avant-garde art movement founded in 1916 which used a variety of media, including collage, sound, nonsense texts and absurd performances to protest against the social, cultural and political conditions prevailing in Europe during World War I. Originating in Zurich, the movement spread to Paris, Berlin, Cologne, Hanover and New York.

DOCUMENTAION

The process of making records with the use of photography, film, video, audio or text to identify or report factual details.

ENVIRONMENTAL ART

A form of art practice which emerged in the 1960s in response to growing concerns about environmental and ecological issues. Traditionally associated with site-specific and installation practice, contemporary Environmental Art encompasses a broad range of media and methodologies.

FEMINISM

A social, political, intellectual and philosophical movement advocating equal rights and representation for women in all aspects of society.

FLUXUS

An international, avant-garde, art movement in the 1960s which included artists, writers, filmmakers and musicians creating experimental, multi-media work in film, video and performance, informed by social and political issues.

GALLERY

An internal space or series of spaces dedicated to the exhibition of artworks.

INSTALLATION ART

A broad term applied to a range of arts practice which involves the installation or configuration of objects in a space, where the totality of the objects and the space comprise the artwork.

LAND ART

A US art movement from the 1960s which emerged out of environmental and ecological concerns and the perceived limitations of the conventional art object to respond to these concerns. Artworks were created within the landscape, often using the materials of the landscape.

MEDIA

In general usage, media refers to forms of communication, such as newspapers, magazines, television, radio and the Internet. In the arts, media, the plural of medium, refers to the materials, methodologies, mechanisms, technologies or devices by which an artwork is realised. Traditional media include painting, sculpture and drawing. The specific materials used, such as paint, charcoal or marble, can also be referred to as media. In Contemporary Art practice media artists use a wide range of media, such as technology, found materials, the body, sound, etc.

MEMORIAL

An object or process to commemorate an individual or event, usually sited in a public place. This may take the form of a gravestone, plaque, sculpture, building, cenotaph, park, temporary installation, event or performance.

MINIMALISM

An abstract art movement developed in the US in the 1960s which emphasised the use of simple, geometric forms and modern materials drawn from industry. It was an extension of abstraction focusing on the properties of the materials used but also a rejection of the ideology and discourse of Abstract Expressionism.

MODERN

Generally refers to the present or the contemporary, it is associated with the period of Modernism from the late nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century. Modern can also be used to describe the period since the Enlightenment in the seventeenth century or the Renaissance in the fifteenth century.

MODERNISM / MODERN ART

Refers to art theory and practice from the 1860s to the late 1960s and is defined in terms of a linear progression of styles, periods and schools, such as Impressionism, Cubism and Abstract Expressionism.

MONUMENT

A structure, such as a statue, building or arch, used to celebrate or commemorate a significant person or event within a society.

NEW GENRE PUBLIC ART

A term coined by American artist Suzanne Lacy to describe a form of socially-engaged Public Art practice which emphasises collectivity and the relationship between the audience and the space.

PARTICIPATORY ART

A form of arts practice which prioritises viewer participation in the conception and/or realisation of an artwork.

PER CENT FOR ART SCHEME

In Ireland, the Per Cent for Art scheme is a government initiative to provide funding for Public Art, whereby a percentage of government funding designated for capital expenditure can be set aside to commission a public artwork. Informed by earlier initiatives by the Office of Public Works (OPW) and the Department of the Environment, a Per Cent for Art Scheme across all Government Departments was established in Ireland in 1997. Such schemes operate in Australia, the US and in most European countries.

POSTCOLONIAL THEORY / POSTCOLONIALISM

An intellectual discourse of the late twentieth century drawing on theories from literature, film, philosophy and social and political science, concerned with the cultural legacy of colonialism in terms of national and cultural identity, race and ethnicity.

POSTSTRUCTURALISM

Theories and methods of analysis drawn from Deconstruction and Psychoanalysis which reject the objectivity of Structuralism, emphasising the plurality of meaning and the instability of categories of intellectual enquiry. Associated with the work of Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and Roland Barthes.

PSYCHOANALYSIS

A theoretical paradigm for understanding human behaviour, and a form of intensive psychotherapeutic treatment in which free association, dream interpretation and consideration of resistance and transference are used to resolve psychological problems. Developed by Sigmund Freud in the late nineteenth century, there are many strands of psychoanalytic theory, including Object Relations Theory and Lacanian psychoanalysis.

PUBLIC ART

Artwork located outside the museum or gallery, usually sited in a public space and supported by public funding.

SCULPTURE

A three-dimensional art object which is either created or constructed by an artist. Includes constructions, assemblages, installations, sound, new media, etc.

SITE

The space in which an artwork is located either temporarily or permanently, such as a gallery space, a space in an art fair or biennial, a public space or a site-specific space where the artwork is created in response to the conditions of that space.

SITE-SPECIFIC ART

Artwork that is created in response to a specific site with the intention of being located in the site and where removal from the site would change the meaning of the artwork. Often associated with Installation Art, Land Art and Public Art.

SOCIALLY-ENGAGED ART

Art practice which is informed by a social agenda and created and realised through engagement, collaboration and/or participation between an artist or artists and a specific social constituency, such as a youth group.

STATUE

A three-dimensional object, usually figurative, representing a person or event.

**public art:
general resources**

The following is a select list of resources. A more detailed list can be found on IMMA's website www.imma.ie

Information Websites**AN - The Artists**

Information Company
Resource information for emerging and established artists and craftspeople. www.a-n.co.uk

Artcyclopedia

Internet encyclopedia on art and artists. www.artcyclopedia.com

Intute

Online service providing information about web resources for education and research. www.intute.ac.uk

The Artists

Database of Modern and Contemporary Art and artists. www.the-artists.org

STOT

Platform providing online links relating to Contemporary Art. www.stot.org

Public Art Websites**Art-public**

European website providing examples of Public Art initiatives on a subscription basis. www.art-public.com

Breaking Ground

Per Cent for Art programme for Ballymun Regeneration Limited, Dublin, 2002 - 2010. www.breakingground.ie

**Public Art
Development Trust**

A London-based organisation that commissioned and produced public projects by contemporary artists. Closed in 2004, the archive of the Trust was acquired by the Henry Moore Institute in 2005. www.henry-moore.org/hmi

Publicart.ie

Online Public Art resource, with an emphasis on Public Art in Ireland, offering practical information and critical texts, including a directory of over 100 public artworks, news and opportunities and video interviews with artists and commissioners. www.publicart.ie

Publicartonline

The website of Public Art South West, UK, offering information, advice, case material, training and examples of policy and strategy documents relating to Public Art. www.publicartonline.org.uk

**Public Monuments and
Sculpture Association
(PMSA)**

A database of public sculpture and monuments in Britain. www.pmsa.org.uk

Republicart

Archive of a transnational research project between 2002 - 2005 by the EIPCP (European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies) which promoted the investigation and development of interventionist and activist practices in Public Art. www.republicart.net

Sheffield Hallam University
Public Art Research Archive
www.shu.ac.uk

Organisations**Academy of Urbanism**

A cross-sector interdisciplinary group promoting good quality urbanism throughout Great Britain and Ireland through discourse, research, education and awards. www.academyofurbanism.org.uk

**Americans for the Arts
Public Art Network (PAN)**

A professional network in the US dedicated to the field of Public Art. www.americansforthearts.org/PAN

Artangel

A London-based organisation which commissions and produces projects by contemporary artists in a range of sites and situations. www.artangel.co.uk

Create

Irish development agency for collaborative arts. www.create-ireland.ie

**Department of
Environment, Heritage and
Local Government.**

Many Local Authorities have Public Art programmes and designated staff members. For a listing of Local Authorities see the website of the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government. www.environ.ie

Irish Architecture Foundation

Resource organisation for architecture in Ireland. www.irisharchitecturefoundation.ie

IXIA

Public Art think tank which works with artists and policy makers in the public and private sectors to create opportunities for artists working in the public realm.
www.ixia.org.uk

Public Art Fund

Presents artists' projects, new commission, and exhibitions in public spaces throughout New York City. Supports artists to produce innovative exhibitions of Contemporary Art outside the traditional context of museums and galleries.
www.publicartfund.org

Sculpture Network

A European non-profit organisation for the support and advancement of contemporary, three-dimensional art.
www.sculpture-network.org/en/home.html

Situations

A commissioning and research programme based at the University of the West of England in Bristol.
www.situations.org.uk

SKOR

Dutch organisation which develops and realises art projects in public spaces.
www.skor.nl

Visual Artists Ireland

All-Ireland body for professional visual artists.
www.visualartists.ie

Public Art Reports**Art Best Placed, Sligo Local Authorities Public Art Plan, 2004-2006,**

available on the Sligo County Council website:
www.sligoarts.ie/PublicArt/PublicArtPublications

Art and the City: Review of the Cork City Council Per Cent for Art Scheme 1986-2003,

Ruairi Ó Cuív, Gandon Editions for Cork City Council, 2006.

Placing Art: The Pilot Public Art Programme,

Sligo County Council, available on the Sligo County Council website:
www.sligoarts.ie/PublicArt/PublicArtPublications

Placing Art, A colloquium on Public Art in Rural, Coastal and Small Urban Environments, 2002,

the keynote papers available on the Sligo County Council website:
www.sligoarts.ie/PublicArt/PublicArtPublications

Public Art: Per Cent for Art Scheme, General National Guidelines,

Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism, Dublin, 2004, available on the Department of Culture, Sport and Tourism website:
www.arts-sport-tourism.gov.ie/pdfs/English-text5.pdf

Public Art Research Project - Steering Group Report to Government,

Dublin 1996, available on the Department of Culture, Sport and Tourism website:
www.arts-sport-tourism.gov.ie/pdfs/PublicArtResearchProject.pdf

10 Years of Public Art in Sligo, 1997-2007,

available on the Sligo County Council website:
www.sligoarts.ie/PublicArt/PublicArtPublications

Journals and Magazines**Art and Architecture**

Journal, UK magazine for Public Art collaboration, contemporary urban culture and architecture.
www.artandarchitecturejournal.com

Art Forum Magazine

www.artforum.com

Art Monthly

www.artmonthly.co.uk

Art Newspaper

www.theartnewspaper.com

Art Review

www.artreview.com

Circa Art Magazine

www.recirca.com

Contemporary

www.contemporary-magazines.com

Critical Inquiry

www.criticalinquiry.uchicago.edu

E-flux

www.e-flux.com/journal

Flash Art

www.flashartonline.com

Frieze Art Journal

www.frieze.com

The International Journal of Cultural Policy

www.tandf.co.uk/journals/titles/10286632.asp

Irish Arts Review

www.irishartsreview.com

Journal of Visual Culture

www.sagepub.com/journals

Printed Project

www.visualartists.ie

Third Text

www.tandf.co.uk/journals/titles/O9528822.asp

The Visual Artists News Sheet

www.visualartists.ie

The Vacuum

www.thevacuum.org.uk

Variant

www.variant.randomstate.org

Museums and Galleries International Museums and Galleries**Art Institute of Chicago**

www.artic.edu

Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Victoria

www.accaonline.org.au

Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art,

Gateshead
www.balticmill.com

Centres Georges

Pompidou, Paris
www.cnac-gp.fr

Dia Art Foundation,

New York
www.diacentre.org

Guggenheim Museum,

Bilbao
www.guggenheim-bilbao.es

ICA

Institute of Contemporary Arts, London
www.ica.org.uk

Kunst-Werke Institute for Contemporary Art,

Berlin
www.kw-berlin.de
Maxxi, Rome
www.maxxi.parc.beniculturali.it/english/museo.htm

Metropolitan Museum of Art,

New York
www.metmuseum.org

Moderna Museet,

Stockholm
www.modernamuseet.se

MOMA

Museum of Modern Art, New York
www.moma.org

Mori Art Museum,

Japan
www.mori.art.museum/eng

Musée d'Orsay,

Paris
www.musee-orsay.fr

Museum of Contemporary Art,

Chicago
www.mcachicago.org

Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma,

Finland
www.kiasma.fi

Museum of Contemporary Art,

Los Angeles
www.moca.org

Museum of Contemporary Art,

Sydney
www.mca.com.au

New Museum of Contemporary Art,

New York
www.newmuseum.org

Reina Sofia,

Madrid
www.museoreinasofia.es

Saatchi Gallery,

London
www.saatchi-gallery.co.uk

San Francisco Museum of Modern Art

www.sfmoma.org

Serpentine Gallery,

London
www.serpentinegallery.org

Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum,

New York
www.guggenheim.org

Stedelijk Museum,

Amsterdam
www.stedelijk.nl

Tate Modern,

London
Tate Britain London,
Tate Liverpool
www.tate.org.uk

Whitechapel Gallery,

London
www.whitechapel.org

White Cube,

London
www.whitecube.com

Whitney Museum of American Art,

New York
www.whitney.org

Witte de With,

Rotterdam
www.wdw.nl

Irish Museums and Galleries**Butler Gallery,**

Kilkenny
www.butleryallery.com

Catalyst Arts Gallery,

Belfast
www.catalystarts.org.uk

Context Gallery,

Derry
www.contextgallery.co.uk

Crawford Municipal Art Gallery,

Cork
www.crawfordartgallery.com

Cross Gallery,

Dublin
www.crossgallery.ie

Dock Arts Centre,

Carrick on Shannon
www.thedock.ie

Douglas Hyde Gallery,

Dublin
www.douglashydegallery.com

Draiocht,

Dublin
www.draiocht.ie

**Dublin City Gallery,
The Hugh Lane**
www.hughlane.ie

Farmleigh Gallery, Dublin
www.farmleighgallery.ie

Fenton Gallery, Cork
[www.artireland.net/
systempl/](http://www.artireland.net/systempl/)

Gallery of Photography,
Dublin
[www.galleryofphotography.
ie](http://www.galleryofphotography.ie)

Galway Arts Centre
www.galwayartscentre.ie

Green On Red Gallery,
Dublin
[www.greenonredgallery.
com](http://www.greenonredgallery.com)

Hallward Gallery, Dublin
www.hallwardgallery.com

Highlanes Gallery,
Drogheda
www.highlanes.ie

Irish Museums Association
www.irishmuseums.org

**IMMA
Irish Museum
of Modern Art,** Dublin
www.imma.ie

Kerlin Gallery, Dublin
www.kerlin.ie

Kevin Kavanagh Gallery,
Dublin
[www.kevinkavanaghgallery.
ie](http://www.kevinkavanaghgallery.ie)

Lewis Glucksman Gallery,
Cork
www.glucksman.org

Limerick City Gallery of Art
www.limerickcitygallery.ie

**Model Arts and Niland
Gallery,** Sligo
www.modelart.ie

Mother's Tankstation,
Dublin
[www.mothers-tankstation.
com](http://www.mothers-tankstation.com)

**Pallas Contemporary
Projects,** Dublin
www.pallasprojects.org

Project Arts Centre, Dublin
www.projectartscentre.ie

RHA
The Royal Hibernian
Academy, Dublin
[www.
royalhibernianacademy.com](http://www.royalhibernianacademy.com)

Rua Red Gallery, Dublin
www.ruared.ie

Rubicon Gallery, Dublin
www.rubicongallery.ie

Taylor Galleries, Dublin
www.taylorgalleries.ie

**Temple Bar Gallery
& Studios,** Dublin
www.templebargallery.com

126, Galway
www.126.ie

Biennials and Art Fairs

Documenta, Kasel
www.documenta.da

ev+a, Limerick
www.eva.ie

Frieze Art Fair, London
www.friezeartfair.com

Istanbul Biennial
www.iksv.org/bienal11

Liverpool Biennial
www.biennial.com/

**Manifesta,
European Biennale
of Contemporary Art**
www.manifesta.org

Moscow Biennale
[www.2nd.moscowbiennale.
ru](http://www.2nd.moscowbiennale.ru)

Bienal de São Paulo
[www.bienalsaopaulo.globo.
com](http://www.bienalsaopaulo.globo.com)

Shanghai Biennale
www.shanghaiennale.com

Skulptur Projekte Münster
www.skulptur-projekte.de

Venice Biennale
www.labiennale.org

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what is series 1?

Questions of permanence and ephemerality are major themes in public art and histories and memories find expression in the built environment - but whose history and whose memories are recorded and can the monument always maintain its original meaning and purpose?

Clíodhna Shaffrey

What is Public Art? is one of a series of talks and booklets on modern and contemporary art, which aims to provide an overview of Public Art, identifying some of the challenges that arise when attempting to define this complex and contested area of arts practice. This booklet includes an essay by **Clíodhna Shaffrey** titled *What is Public Art?*

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