

IMMA
COURTYARD GALLERIES - EAST GROUND

IMMA Archive: 1990s

From the Edge to the Centre



IMMA Archive: 1990s, From the Edge to the Centre provides an opportunity to celebrate an ambitious IMMA Collection and Archive Digitisation Project initiated in 2017 and made possible by the support of the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

In advance of IMMA's thirtieth anniversary in 2021, the exhibition considers the rich early history of IMMA's programme and Collection and how since day one IMMA has nurtured and promoted the role of contemporary art to engage with the key social, political and cultural issues that affect us all today. Such as civil rights, migration, gender construction, the environment, the economy and many others.

The exhibition offers a space to consider the early history of IMMA's programme and Collection through the lens of the documentation and archival material it has amassed, and to revisit the artists and audiences who have been at the heart of the institution since its inception in May 1991.

The exhibition will present newly digitised material from the archive and revisit IMMA in its first years to consider the aims and challenges of the new museum, its earliest exhibitions, the development of the Collection and the drive to bring contemporary art from the edge, to the centre of Irish society and contemporary life. As IMMA prepares to enter its fourth decade, the unfolding

archive provides invaluable insight into the formation of the institution as we continue to grow and record contemporary art's responses and insights to the evolving political, social and cultural changes in our society.

IMMA Archive: 1990s is a statement of intent, an articulation of the possibilities of the long-term development of the Collection and Programme Archive as a resource for research, presentation and learning, which will be fully realised in IMMA's future Collection and Learning Centre. Built over almost thirty years, the archive comprises a wealth of original material including correspondence, artists' proposals, sketches, installation instructions, photographs, press cuttings and audio-visual recordings. A selection of these can now be seen for the first time.

The exhibition also showcases the essential digitisation of the IMMA Collection made possible through this project. From March 2019, four hundred artworks have been photographed and added to the Collection Online while the conservation and digitisation of a first selection of the Museum's ninety time-based media artworks (these include video, sound, slide, film, software and other digital artworks) has enabled access to a number of artists' film and video works from the 1990s. The wide range of material on view illustrates how the IMMA Collection and

Archive together represent one of the most significant resources for the study of contemporary Irish art and demonstrates the potential for new knowledge where the artwork and archive intersect to present a series of histories, stories and relationships.

Room One

IMMA opened on 25 May 1991 with an inaugural suite of exhibitions and projects entitled **Inheritance and Transformation**. The first seventy exhibitions by the end of 1999, one of its ambitious aims was to identify the new museum as outlined by founding Director Declan McGonagle as “a function as well as a building where explorations of the making and mediation of art in place are necessary components of the institution’s work”. Positioning process and engagement above the retrospective purchasing of a permanent collection, the IMMA galleries served as artists’ studios before opening to the public and the first acquisitions included three proposals developed specifically for the museum’s historic new home.

This room contains an illustrated timeline built from the archive of moments in the museum’s first formative decade, including numerous exhibitions, significant donations to the Collection, the establishment of two major awards the Glen Dimplex Artists Award in 1994, and the Nissan Art Awards in 1999, the launch of the

Artists' Work Programme, now the IMMA Residency Programme in 1994, and the National Programme in 1997. Exhibition catalogues and publications displayed here in room two, demonstrate the scope and ambition which drove the museum as it grew its audiences and collection while original and newly digitised archival material illustrates some of the less tangible but equally important processes, events and relationships which coloured and shaped IMMA in these years. Through correspondence with artists, lenders and other institutions, photographs, floor plans, proposals, documentation of events, audience and media responses, stories, information and new knowledge emerge from the unfolding archive which adds to our understanding of both the past and the present.

Map of the Sky (1993) by Jimmie Durham was first shown in IMMA's second major series of exhibitions, artists' projects and residencies entitled **From Beyond the Pale**. This ambitious project included forty-five artists and took place between September 1994 and February 1995 throughout the museum's galleries and at sites across the city. Among the first participants in the Artists' Work Programme, launched during From Beyond the Pale, Durham is one of many artists who links IMMA's different programming strands and the organic formation of the permanent collection.

Room Two

The video archive material featured in this room was first filmed as part of a speculative documentary project between IMMA and artist filmmaker Joe Lee. Beginning in 1991, the project aimed to capture the wide variety of exhibitions and programmes through which the new institution was establishing its identity as the Irish Museum of Modern Art. The resulting footage is part of a dialogue and record between a dynamic programming strategy and the burgeoning development of a Collection of contemporary art.

Notable here are recordings of the newly launched 'Artist Residency Programme' in 1997 and 1998 and the extensive documentation over many years of IMMA's collaboration with older people and community groups such as the Family Resource Centre in St Michael's Estate, a long-term project which resulted in the artwork **Open Season** (1997) being acquired for the IMMA Collection following the exhibition **Once Is Too Much** in 1997.

Exploring the issue of violence against women, **Open Season** (1997) is one of a number of recordings focusing on female artists from the exhibition, collection, education and Artists' Residency Programme in the 1990s. Although just three of the first forty-one works acquired into the IMMA collection were by women, this documentation

illustrates the strong voices and significant contribution of women artists across all stands of the museum in its first formative years. Featured artists Pauline Cummins, Alice Maher, Alanna O'Kelly, Kathy Prendergast, and Louise Walsh address issues of identity, history, nationality and autonomy which are still relevant today.

Discontinued due to budgetary restraints in the late 1990s, the master tapes which were stored and archived by Joe Lee, have until now been inaccessible. This newly digitised first selection from the archive clearly demonstrates the importance of this unique footage in preserving and retelling these stories.

From the outset IMMA developed a dynamic series of public talks, lectures and symposia that opened conversations around the programme, bringing the audience deeper into the thinking and making of contemporary art.

In association with the live programme, IMMA Talks archives recordings of past public talks, in operation since IMMA's inception in 1991, has been integrated into one Audio Archive library. Over the years this has accumulated into a rich resource dedicated to contemporary art discourse and practice in Ireland and features the voices of many artists, curators and educators who discuss the ever-evolving contexts in which art is made. The IMMA Audio Archive is testament to the museum's formative years, its programming history,

and sheds light on many artworks held in instead of comprising the IMMA Permanent Collection.

Many past talks are published on the IMMA Soundcloud Channel, where audiences can listen back to individual talks and themed playlists. While we work to digitise the complete Audio Archive, we are delighted to share a selection of analogue recordings spanning the 1990s, now digitised and available for the first time, as part of this archive display.

Room Three

This room showcases the conservation and digitisation of the Museum's Collection of time-based media artworks (these include video, sound, slide, film, software and other digital artworks). Each of the ninety works in the IMMA Collection that falls into the category of 'time-based media' is represented here in a large wall display.

On the monitors, visitors can watch a selection of these works from the 1990s, which have been recently digitised. The transfer of tapes to digital files has opened up access to certain earlier works in the Collection that were previously difficult or even impossible to view due to obsolete technologies and formats like Laserdisc and Betacam tapes.

It is important to underline that what you see here is only an element of each artwork and not how the works are intended to be seen in an exhibition. Photos and drawings from the archive placed next to the monitors tell the stories of how each work should be experienced within an exhibition. Each artist has kindly given permission for their work to be accessed in this way in the context of the archive and research project, making this is a one-off opportunity to view the works as part of the wider Collection.

Room Four

Alanna O'Kelly's work **Sanctuary/Wastelands** (1994) was first exhibited at IMMA in 1994 when the artist was shortlisted and won the inaugural Glen Dimplex Artists Awards. Originally a slide-tape installation the work was conceived from a performance by O'Kelly at the Teampall Dumhach Mhor or 'Church of the Great Sandbank' at Thallabhawn, County Mayo. During the performance O'Kelly circled the burial mound while keening for the dead. This site was a monastic settlement from the sixth century and became a famine burial ground in the nineteenth century. Known as 'The Sanctuary' to seventeenth century mapmakers, it was referred to as 'The Wastelands' by local people in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Constant erosion eventually dissolved the mound thus intensifying the significance of O'Kelly documentation and working of the site.

The original slide-tape installation involved three projectors; one static image of the mound while the other two projectors slowly revealed close-up elements of the site. Subsequently, **Sanctuary/Wastelands** was included in the Iniscealtra Festival, Mountshannon, as part of the IMMA National Programme and experienced technical difficulties during the run of the exhibition. This, along with the fact the work was to be included in a touring exhibition entitled **Irish Art Now: from The Poetic to the Political** (1999-2001), curated by then IMMA Director Declan McGonagle, led O'Kelly to re-imagine the work in advance of the tour, transferring the installation from slide based projection to video. While visually the work remained in keeping with the original version, the sound was changed with the help of Tommy Hayes, one of the world's leading artists in traditional Irish music. The reconfiguring of the work was in part a practical response to the challenges surrounding the display of a slide-based installation and the reliance on relatively unstable equipment.

IMMA wishes to acknowledge the invaluable support of the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht in realising the archive and digitisation project and resulting exhibition.

IMMA wishes to thank the commitment of the artists represented in the exhibition. We would also like to thank Declan McGonagle, IMMA's founding Director; Joe Lee, Filmmaker; Denis Mortell, Photographer; Noureen Oureshi, Paper Conservator and our colleagues from the Council of National Cultural Institutions, especially the Digitisation & Cataloguing committee.

Our thanks to Martin Bradley, Director, Archives Ireland and archivists Christina Tse and Stephen Brady.

IMMA would like to thank our invaluable Members, Patrons and Partners for their continuous support.

This exhibition is curated by Johanne Mullan, Curator: Collections, IMMA, Ciara Ball, Archive Co-ordinator, IMMA and Claire Walsh, Assistant Curator: Care & Access, IMMA.

Exhibition Team

Helen O'Donoghue, Senior Curator: Head of Engagement and Learning

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For further information on the IMMA Audio Archive please contact Sophie Byrne, Assistant Curator – Talks and Public Programmes, email sophie.byrne@imma.ie

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Have a question about an artwork? Want to know more? Ask any member of our Visitor Engagement Team, easily identifiable through their blue lanyards.

Front cover:

Lawrence Weiner

(...) WATER & SAND + STICKS & STONES (...), 1991

Language + the materials referred to

Dimensions variable

Collection Irish Museum of Modern Art

Purchase, 1991

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THE DEVLIN

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