

Michael McLoughlin

Michael McLoughlin's recent work combines audio, video, drawing, photography and sculptural objects. The work often involves collaboration or co-operation with residents of a particular locale and explores social relationships with the built environment. He has been involved in many public art processes in Ireland, including In Context 2 2000/2002 and Breaking Ground 2005/2008 which sought to re-define notions of public art.

Since graduating from LSAD in 1994, McLoughlin has made site-specific artworks in association with many individuals and groups. McLoughlin has exhibited widely in Ireland and internationally. He has presented work at The Lab, Dublin, Limerick City Gallery of Art, Triskel Arts Centre, Cork and as part of audio art radio events such as *Resonant Cities*, Glasgow 2004, *Lola Gallery* San Francisco 2003 and *SonicEye*, Helsinki 2000. McLoughlin has collaborated with various artists including *Audience (1) Waltzers* with Mary Nunan, presented at Limerick City Gallery of Art, *Eigse Festival*, Carlow The Lab, Dublin and *Vibrate Festival*, Roscommon 2006/2008.

Published to coincide with the exhibition of the same name at Limerick City Gallery of Art, 12 September – 16th November 2008.

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Bingo! hosted by Mike Finn. Culture Night at Limerick City Gallery of Art

Limerick City Gallery of Art:

Director/Curator	Mike Fitzpatrick
Care of Collections and Exhibitions	Siobhán O'Reilly
Curator Audience and Access	Pippa Little
Shinnors Scholarship	Susan Holland

Design: AVID Graphic Design

Photography: Matthew Gidney and Michael McLoughlin.



It's All About Change 2008 Dual Video Installation 10 Minutes Collaboration with Jon Kenny & Mike Finn

In It's All About Change, a large monochrome projection focuses on the face of an older man in a Library setting, juxtaposed with a smaller projection to the left of colourful bouncing bingo balls. The monologue of the man describes an adventurous youth, emigrating from Limerick to London at sixteen, to avoid a monotonous job for life working in Ranks Mills. Referencing the histories of the City, actor Jon Kenny gives a gentle but searing insight into the all too common story of Irish emigration in the 1960's. This collaboration between McLoughlin, Kenny and writer Mike

Finn developed a poignant character, based loosely on an narrative that Kenny had touched on in the 1980's. Although initial memories are positive, reminiscing on visits to the old Carnegie Free Library, now LCGA, soon the character reveals immense loneliness stemming from a lack of family ties and friends network. This emotive depiction exemplifies McLoughlin's concerns with isolation and loneliness, reiterating a need for support structures in human existence.

A melancholy pervades the exhibition, although each of the installations explore activities of engagement and human contact, just below the surface lurks the possibility of loneliness. These social groups or surrogate families can abate our human vulnerability in fulfilling 'the need to be missed'¹² that McLoughlin references. *I Only Come Here 'Cos It's Free* succeeds in making us aware of our humanity, of our common need of companionship, meaningful connections and of not to be forgotten.

Susan Holland, Shinnors Scholarship, Oct 2008.



I Only Come Here 'Cos It's Free, is a poignant title and relevant to our down-turning economy, yet emblazoned in red rope light on the gallery exterior, it may also succeed in breaking down the conditioned elitism many people still associate with contemporary art. Michael McLoughlin's lyrical evocations of habitual events combine a keen sense of social awareness with a rigorous conceptual framework; utilising combinations of drawing, audio, installation and film in a highly experimental process.

McLoughlin's work contemplates societal interaction from its basic premise, that necessity of human contact, of belonging in some aspect to a family, group or network. He works in a collaborative and holistic process with individuals and groups, rather than through formal workshops. The resultant work is created jointly with the groups or reciprocally by McLoughlin during the process. This practice developed from initial experimental interactions with Limerick based groups, including Limerick Traveller Development Group in which he and the women's group interviewed members of the public culminating in an audio installation. McLoughlin has in recent times worked with communities in a more flexible way, exploring content which they deem important. This flexibility allows the work to be increasingly direct and give a clearer voice to those he collaborates with. Developing these meaningful interactions with people has been key to his process.

¹ Cuchulainn, a mythical Irish warrior undefeatable in battle and demi-god champion of Ulster. He slew Cúlan's hound with a Hurl and Sliotar at the age of six and vowed to work in the hound's place until he could raise a pup strong enough to replace the beast. The boy was renamed Cuchulainn meaning 'Hound of Cúlan'.

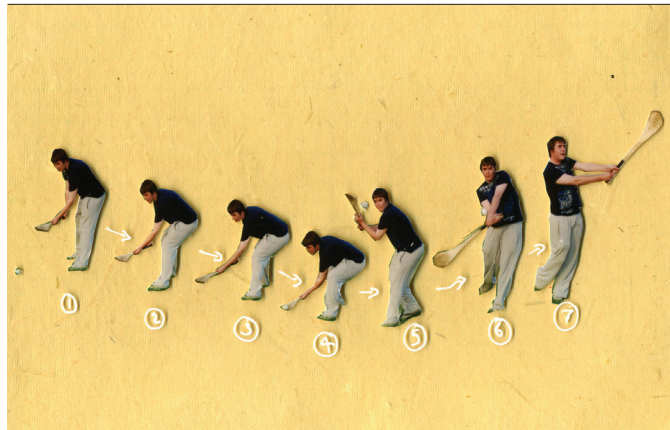
² October 2nd 2008, In Conversation between Michael McLoughlin and Mike Fitzpatrick at LCGA.





The initial work encountered in the atrium, *Place To Meet Up*, presents a series of collaged drawings, situating a group of middle aged women in an office-like compartmentalised environment. The women look around them, smiling and watching, highly aware of each others' presence. There is a sense of camaraderie and unspoken connections in their activity. The women are playing bingo, at the Star Bingo Hall in Crumlin, Dublin, the bingo hall has become a jovial space of happy banter, an alternative drop in centre. The activity is seen as social, yet is paradoxically solitary. Their individuality comes across fully in McLoughlin's drawings, as does the amicability of the activity.

In a small rectangular gallery a strange audio recording from Doyles, an all-day bingo venue off Dublin's Moore Street, echoes. Now demolished, it was a dark and solitary place where people came and went. The pace of the game is slow and reverential. A lone bingo ball floats in the air, a mystic object. Behind this tabernacle, a five foot light-box displays a used bingo card; the numbers are connected forming man-made constellations. The sacred atmosphere of *Numbers Are In The Stars* further suggests the importance of the activity to regular participants and challenges the associations non-players may have towards the game.



As an artist, he views his role as that of facilitator and communicator, giving voice to the isolated of our community. Stemming from a concern with the difficulties of immigration, of which Irish people are no strangers, McLoughlin developed *Hurling Alone*. Instructions for basic skills of hurling, the Irish national game played with a small sliotar ball and hurl stick, are demonstrated through diagrams presented in the gallery atrium. These drawings are posted in the on-line Polish Forum of Limerick for the duration of the exhibition, as Polish immigrants now make up 8% of the population of the Limerick region. The instructions may allow young Polish men, statistically the most likely to feel isolated in our changing society, an opportunity to develop a new skill, potentially increasing their support structure through participation in a sporting team.



Projection of Hurling Alone

A panoramic projection in the northern gallery watches a young man raise the sliotar and deftly hit it long with his hurl. Running after the sliotar, the Cuchulainn¹ like lone hurler slowly crosses the lengthy screen again. This time a voice speaks. A Polish man tells of his experience immigrating, of the difficulty integrating into a new culture, emphasising the importance of friends and support networks in that transitory phase. He articulates his experience in Polish. Experiencing the Polish language in an Irish institution seems strange for both Polish and Irish viewers, exchanging places of understanding in this, a country of English mother-tongue.



William Callag 2008 Bingo Blower, Light Boxes, Drawings & Audio Installation 15 Minutes Audio recording from Bingo Event Askeaton

William Callag echoes from the long rectangular gallery, here the audio is again paced and ethereal, distancing the viewer from the social occasion. The recording documents the first bingo night for 25 years in Askeaton, County Limerick, coordinated by the artist in July 2008, as part of the Askeaton Contemporary Arts Festival.

McLoughlin invited the whole community to partake resulting in the most enthusiastically supported event of the festival. The audio, played through old public address tannoy style speakers, has been partially slowed, emphasising the rhetoric and masking the odd inclusions of the word 'sheep', which

became the exhortation of the night. The Askeaton bingo night rallied public interest and enthusiasm, resulting in a highly focused group engagement. Juxtaposed in the space is a vintage bingo machine connected to two light-boxes, sourced from an American Veteran Group in Virginia. These displays which normally light-up the numbers called now illuminate gestural drawings of the participants at the Askeaton bingo night. A second bingo night was facilitated in LCGA to coincide with both this exhibition and national culture night, resulting in another jovial occasion. McLoughlin's enigmatic, stepped-down documentation of these participatory events glimpses communal activity and the

underlying desire for social contact.

We Are Here Every Monday Night overhears a group of men talk and hush as darts are aimed and thrown to a dartboard. The projected board moves duplicating in a slow haze, the men chat again. The film was shot in September 2008 in the Black Swan bar on Davis Street, Limerick, where the team meet every week to practice together and to catch up on the week's news. Concentration is essential to this activity, unifying the players in their pursuit. The duality of the dartboard in the projection softens the aesthetic, while echoing the men's vocal exchanges.





The Numbers in the Stars 2008 Lightbox, Acrylic Spheres, Blowers, Audio Installation



William Calling 2008 Bingo Blower, Light Boxes, Drawings & Audio Installation 15 Minutes Audio recording from Bingo Event Askavon