

Michael McLoughlin: Welcome Back

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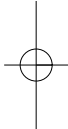
Breaking Ground //////////////////////////////////////

Welcome Back!

Michael McLoughlin //////////////////////////////////////

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Introduction

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Michael McLoughlin's projects in Ballymun have seen many developments and departures since 2005. Commissioned under the Collaborative Commissions strand in 2005, Michael has been working extensively with the residents of St. Margaret's halting site since that time.

The initial stages of Michael's research saw him develop a body of work made out of a series of conversations and interviews with the residents, charting stories of their travels and movements in to and out of Ballymun. This work resulted in a series of visual and audio works which launched at the Lab gallery in Dublin city centre in late 2006. This work was expanded along the way to include stories from people across Ballymun, highlighting the movement

and relocation of people across this changing suburb of Dublin. A second aspect of this project was the planned creation of a mural work - a series of digital prints on aluminium - on the entrance to the site at St. Margaret's. However, so successful was Michael's work at the site, the residents were inspired to create their own work and Michael assisted in creating and installing the resident's large format work at the entrance to the site. Reflecting the

residents own interests, this religious themed work served to remind us that the strength of faith within this community is still strong and potent. Adapting to the changing site at St. Margaret's, Michael's original mural work, Welcome Back, being installed at the time of writing, at an alternative entrance to the site on St. Margaret's Road in October 2008, literally acting as a welcome sign to people moving between the halting site and the new houses established as part of the regeneration.

The changing aspects to Michael's project illustrate the potential of contemporary art to be a force of inspiration and benefit to the wider community, while remaining true to the artist's vision and the spirit of

contemporary art at the same time - and proof once again of the potential of contemporary art in society.

Paul McAree
Art Projects Manager

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Q & As

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In October 2008 Paul McAree talked to Michael McLoughlin about his work.

Q. Your project seems to have gone through many changes over a long period of time. Where did it begin and how did it start and develop?

A. I was commissioned in 2005, in May, to work on a project, which would develop in St. Margaret's Halting Site. Through that summer I began to meet a few people and figure out how to begin to work. In September, I started to work with a group of Health workers on the site. All the early work I began to make related specifically to concerns they had. Their remit concerned knowledge of general health on the halting site and assisting people accessing health services. A lot of the problems at the time

resulted from overcrowding – electricity off a lot, sewage problems, for instance.

One of the first bodies of work I started to make with the women related to population. Initially, sculptural drawings that mapped out the site and leading to a series of pieces of music based on the numbers of residents in each of the thirty bays on the site.

From that, particularly because of the time of the year, electricity became a real issue. In winter more power is used than in summer so it becomes a real problem.

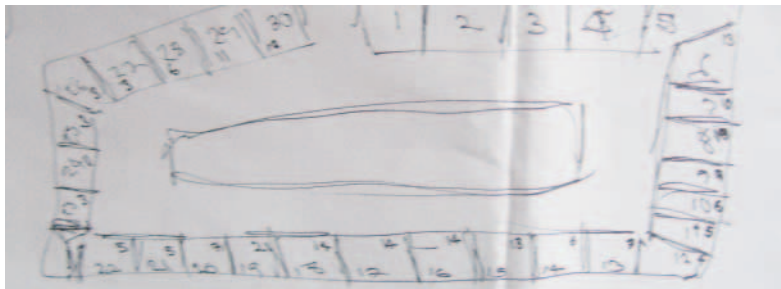
Q. Tell me the story about the electricity, because a piece of work

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Q & As

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Drawing of the site, preparatory work for 30 bays sound piece. Pen on paper (2005)

came out of this. What was happening on the site?

A. When the site was built it was built with thirty bays, for thirty families. And it was given an electrical supply designed for thirty families with minimal usage. Now, by 2005 there were 65 families permanently residing on the halting site.

So as you can imagine, particularly in the winter, when more people are using heaters, cooking and generally indoors more, the electricity would regularly go off in large sections of the halting site. And when it would come back on another section would go and so on. At stages the power could be off for weeks.

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Maquette for Our Friend Electric. Collage, foamex and bike lights (2006)

It was inevitable that I'd make work relating to it, as this was a huge concern on the site at the time. One of the exhibition pieces in The Lab related specifically to the pattern of electricity going on and off over a four month period. I think it was November, December, January, and February. The electricity was off more than it was on.

The piece sequenced the power going on and off in each bay with LEDs embedded in an aerial image of St. Margaret's and was accompanied by a sound piece that was made using the same information.

Q. So, this narrative-based work evolved out of talking to people and finding out their stories, and you would make mathematical patterns based on peoples day to day lives. Were your other works which came out around the same time made in a similar way?

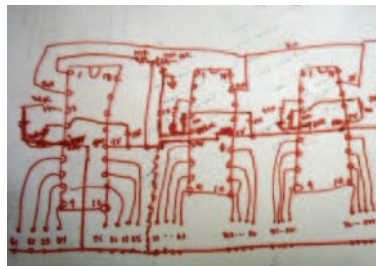
A. Yeah, the one thread that runs through the project is the information that is contained within the work has been gathered and collected from people in St. Margaret's. Thematically, overall this related to different kinds of

Q & As

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to-ing and fro-ing. Whether with the piece we just spoke about, or the works relating specifically to movement of people. A lot of the initial stories collected, related to how people arrived in Ballymun. Journeys people have made along the way – maybe in childhood or maybe pilgrimage from St. Margaret's. We recorded stories of journeys that show aspects of Traveller traditions and the old ways of living.

One aspect that was important within the project was how the residents of St. Margaret's are part of the Ballymun Community and should be seen as such. I suppose I wanted to show how residents had an equal right to a sense of belonging to Ballymun as anyone else and shouldn't be viewed in isolation. So, the project extended to include all of

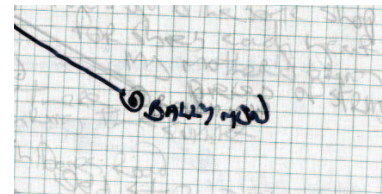
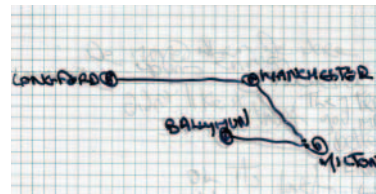
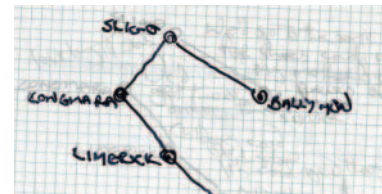
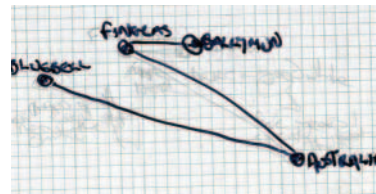
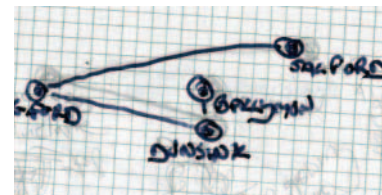
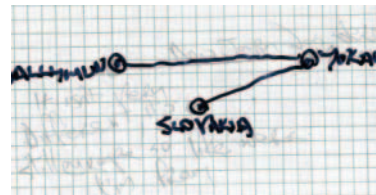


Circuit drawing for Our Friends Electric from Tom Laureanno. (2006)

Ballymun with the aim of representing the diversity of the community and the journeys people have made to and through Ballymun.

Q. Did you feel it was a natural development of the work to broaden it out? Did you feel it was a separate thing? Did you feel it was connected to the work in St. Margaret's?

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Drawings of journeys. Preparatory work for Where did we come from. Pen/graphite on graph paper. (2006)

Q & As

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I think it was connected. One thing that I found noticeable was a feeling of segregation from the rest of the area. And broadening the project out aimed to represent people from St. Margaret's as they should be, as an important part of the Ballymun Community. Also they should be part of the changing Ballymun.

Q. You had always planned to make work for the entrance walls. How did this come about?

A. Initially, when looking at what the project can leave behind or what could have a long-term local value, I thought of a permanent work. I think there's definite process of exchange and leaving something that definitely belongs to the residents of St. Margaret's behind was very important.

The choice of the entrance was to remove any perception that it isn't a welcoming place, because it very much is and it should deliberately welcome you into St. Margaret's.

Because of the way it was built, with only one entrance and high walls all around, inevitably people only enter there if they have to – there is no through traffic. So the work and site aimed to remind people that this is not out of bounds.

Also, the concrete squares are very like picture frames, making the entrance a natural gallery.

Q. How did you find working with the community in St. Margaret's? What did they make of this contemporary art thing, how did they react to it?

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Residents work in progress on entrance to St. Margaret's. (2007)

Q & As

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Michael to supply text for this caption.

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A. Very well. There were so many different facets to the project that ended up having different lives. The recordings for instance were used by the health workers in different formats at several events. The initial proposed entrance work spurred interest in that site and presented the entrance as a possible space that hadn't been considered before. So maybe that initial proposal made residents look at it as a place they could explore themselves.

Q. That's what I find so interesting about the work you did in St. Margaret's. Not only did the residents like the project but they were inspired to suggest their own work for that site. That's fantastic. And in a way it was separate from contemporary art, it wasn't attempting to be art at

all, but was an affirmation of the strength of faith of this community. They took inspiration from the other work which then had to be moved. How did you feel about the fact that the residents took such ownership over the work going on in St. Margaret's, and in a way you had to adapt to a different location?

A. I thought it was great. It's the best case scenario. Processes like this one, should begin to allow for local engagement, ownership and developments. This is one of those theoretical things that you aim for, but to see it in practice is fantastic.

And for myself, I have got an awful lot from the whole process. So whatever way I can facilitate this continuing, I will.

Q & As

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Q. It is fantastic development. I suppose there are two sides to it; on one hand it's a compromise for an artist to not have their work where they thought it might go but on the other hand, that people might be so involved in the work, that's a good trade off.

A. Yeah, if you look at the whole body of work that came out of the commission, it all has different levels of and types of engagement.

For example, to use the extremes; the permanent sited work is very much resident led and a lot of the exhibited work was very much artist led. And that is an important part of the inherent trade off.

After this process there is an understanding that everyone has both

assisted and gained. And in the long term, it will result in a local enthusiasm, which will result in probably more self-initiated work. I think that is really important.

Q. I'm interested, you say you got a lot out of it as an artist. How do you feel working in such a social context effects your own work, how does it effect your studio practice? Do you think they should even be seen as separate things or should they be seen more holistically?

A. I think there's no separating them really. They are one in the same practice. The methods of working that I use have been developed in various contexts, some studio based, some social. Like many of my peers I have, over time, developed a particular

artistic language which in itself continues to change. But it's this language and methodology that I use to begin to examine a given scenario, studio based or otherwise.

Q. So when you are working on a project like this, it's a very interesting situation, you are working with a very distinct community. As opposed to in Ballymun town centre, St. Margaret's is slightly removed; it's on the edge of Ballymun. You have people who facilitate work with St. Margaret's residents and on the other hand you have the commissioners. So, how do you navigate a path through the different people involved?

A. I think an important part of this process is recognising that there are so

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many parties involved. You are not really working in isolation. In relation to this commission for instance you have quite a few partners. There is Breaking Ground, the Artist, the Residents of St. Margaret's, the staff in St. Margaret's, the St. Margaret's Halting Site Community Association, Ballymun Regeneration and Dublin City Council. In some form or another each has a stake in the project and have their own idea or expectation of what this process will be. Probably all have their own idea what collaborative practice can be. And maybe notions of what the end result might be.

Through being involved in various different processes, I have begun to understand potentially what my role can be in a given situation and what you can

Q & As

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bring to it. And realising that you are limited to the language that you have as an artist to interpret a situation – and it's probably the reason you are there in the first place. And you hope that all partners in a project understand that too.

Q. You are nearly finished the project in St. Margaret's Halting Site. I'm curious what you think about endings, as you are coming to the end of a long period of work. How do you feel as an artist finishing a project – do you see it as a finite thing or do you think about leaving something behind? Do you think "That's my work done now" or should there be built in sustainability?

A. Given the way the project worked, there have been very definite end points – but they have been added to as the

project developed. So, there is a pattern emerging really that in some way will continue.

It does mean that, in some form or another, the project has been successful. And in relation to the previous question, for a number of the partners it has served a valuable function and for me it has allowed for the development of new ways of working.

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Michael McLoughlin

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Michael McLoughlin (b. 1972) is a practising artist based in Dublin. He has exhibited widely in Ireland and internationally in France, Finland, UK and USA. He has previously exhibited at The Lab, Dublin, Limerick City Gallery of Art, Limerick, Triskel Art Centre, Cork and as part of audio art radio events such as AART, IMMA (1995), SonicEye, Helsinki (2000) and Resonant Cities, Glasgow (2004).

McLoughlin's recent work combines audio, drawing, photography and sculptural objects, and has explored social relationships with the built environment. The work often involves collaboration/ co-operation with residents of a particular locale.

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He has collaborated on performative works with Choreographer Mary Nunan including Audience1: Waltzers (2007, 2008) and Return Journey (2008).

McLoughlin also had a major exhibition entitled 'I Only Come Here Cos It's Free' at Limerick City Gallery of Art in 2008.

The work made McLoughlin's Breaking Ground commission involved elements of sculpture drawing photography and sound. The work from 'Welcome Back' continues to be exhibited and much of the work was sited in DCU's outreach centre in Ballymun for 2008 & 2009.

Timeline

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JUL '05 //////////////////////////////////////

Start of project. Initial meetings in St. Margaret's and finding out how to begin.

During this time smaller projects of temporary work painting, recording, drawing or photography could happen. I'd consider these more as conversations, because their main function would be to get to know a core group of people from the St. Margaret's community and figure out how we can interpret the various ideas and concerns that would have become prominent.

I'd be keen on relating these to the broader Ballymun area, the city or nationally. I suppose St. Margaret's is quite isolated from the rest of Ballymun, so projecting outwards like this might not be a bad way to start. So initially maybe aim towards an

event in Ballymun with a strong social element and an exhibition that can maybe travel to several venues?

Our main focus initially is to figure out the nature of our collaboration. It is important that we establish how we intend to work together and how we will work in St. Margaret's. Recognising that there are three partners in the collaboration is important and by figuring out what we all intend to get from the process early on, it may be easier to establish common aims.

SEP '05 //////////////////////////////////////

Started working with health care workers in St. Margaret's. Started to make introductory working. Showing previous work, listening to music, exchanging ideas.

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OCT '05 //////////////////////////////////////

At the minute I am working on a short project with the 6 new health care workers on in St. Margaret's. Their role is to find out specific information about the site. I think this a good way to begin get to know the site and the people who live there.

Over the next three months, I'd hope to get to know as much about the site, new houses and how St. Margaret's relates to the broader Ballymun area. After this three month period I will sit down, figure out what I have learned and decide on how we will begin to develop final work for the project.

I think it's important to stress the aim of work we are doing presently is to help grow a relationship with St. Margaret's and finding a way of developing a body of artwork that relates ideas, stories or aspirations we all share. Already I've heard little stories relating to new developments and thoughts people have on the subject that are of interest.

I've started by making a foam outline of the site (about 8ft x 4ft) that can be

Timeline

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used for collecting information and examining patterns of occurrence of different things. Making this means we have to physically measure bays and collect information for the map. While doing this I'm also collecting stories and opinions of people I meet. I'll be making audio recordings of these meetings.

I'm interested in the statistics that are being collected and how they can be interpreted. I'm curious how people relate to the statistics and maybe, to see if you can make an accurate representation of an area with the statistics alone.

The new houses and the new community that will move in also interest me. It seems like an opportunity to begin to broaden the outlook of the project. There

are door to door surveys being conducted there in December. It's possible that these will mainly relate to wellbeing.

The move from St. Margaret's itself is quite interesting and will possibly document some of this process.

Observations...

Below are a few things that I've noticed at this early stage that could be interpreted into work as the project develops.

The move of quite a large number of people to new homes is due to happen in December. This is standard council accommodation as opposed to group housing and is part of an estate with housing for settled families (no high walls, segregation, etc). As far as I

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Timeline

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Know, this is the first time in the country that this has happened.

I think you forget how close St. Margaret's is to Ballbutcher Lane (there is a pedestrian entrance at the back of the site that lends on to it). And this will be more apparent with the new entrance at that side of the site is completed. The school, church and shop (by the courts, in Poppintree) are considered quiet near.

Statistics are something that have popped up a bit, (The number of families per bay, the age profile of the site, etc). Surprisingly, this is mainly because the Traveller community haven't previously included in the national 5 year survey health and living conditions and for the first time they will be. As

a result, information is currently being gathered on the site for this survey.

One thing is that the general conversation tends to relate to a broader area that includes Poppintree, the main street, friends around Dublin, and frequently outside Dublin (Tulamore, Portlaoise, Limerick, Wexford). And the conversation isn't necessarily Traveller specific.

NOV '05 //////////////////////////////////////

Start to make sound works.

MUSIC...

I recorded 9 pieces of music and in advance of making the work, I brought in pieces by a broad range of contemporary composers to listen to, including John Cage, Steve Reich

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or other composers of system based methods of composition. The women were particularly keen on some treated ballroom recordings by The Caretaker and Different Trains by Steve Reich.

How sound relates to a time and place was important in our discussions. We began to record stories and see how a sound can place the story. These recordings are stand-alone works that show one aspect of the projects development. The pieces use the population of the site as source material. The score was made directly from the number of people living in each bay.

NOV - DEC '05 //////////////////////////////////////

Electricity has been going on and off on the site for sometime. It begins to get worse as usage increases in the winter.

Sewage is also a problem. Overcrowding causes many of the problems. Work begins to focus on this.

MAR '06 //////////////////////////////////////

Problem on site worsen

Public meeting in St. Margaret's.

Record public meeting. Print quotes from meeting. Present both in Axis as part of Talking Point (find name of Felicity Williams show)

(Refer to meeting on Page 30)

APR '06 //////////////////////////////////////

Begin to chart electricity patterns. Broaden this to all of Ballymun.

Timeline

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APR '06 CONT. //////////////////////////////////

Collect stories relating to how people arrived in Ballymun. Begin to broaden this beyond St. Margaret's.

Radio Documentaries...

I've recorded five short radio pieces with the health workers, each about different aspects of Traveller life. One for example is about life in tents and horse drawn wagons. It's from experience growing up in the west of Ireland in the 1960s of two women from the site. Another is about wearing glasses and how a lot of people, men in particular wouldn't wear them.

Maps...

I began looking at the geography St. Margaret's in relation to the rest of Ballymun and the routes to different

services. I was curious how St. Margaret's, because most structures are classed as temporary, seems empty on maps compared to aerial views where it's obviously overcrowded.

Movement...

As a result of an initial process of looking at the moving process that 22 families in St. Margaret's are going through, I began to look at the journeys people have made around Ballymun. I've worked with allocation information as a source for drawings, on aerial photos, that trace journeys to new homes. An example being where people from Peatse Tower moved to in Poppintree and Sillogue.

From other places...

An extension of this was to look at where various people living in Ballymun came from.

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Timeline

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Initially from St. Margaret's places like Longford, Sligo, Milton Keynes, Salford and Limerick come up. I'm interested in what parts of Dublin older residents came from and countries newer residents have recently moved from (accession states for instance). The final exhibit will tour to some of these places, each show will have a piece highlighting the connection with the city in question. I envisage the touring exhibition as a series of homecomings and the show will celebrate the connection with each place it goes.

MAY '06 //////////////////////////////////////

Advertise for more participants. Local papers and posters.

Work with youth group in St. Margaret's. Make My Bay pieces.

SEP '06 //////////////////////////////////////

Welcome Back in The LAB

The work, in many ways tracks movement within, to and through a locality. It tries to track the links with other cities, towns and countries that Ballymun shares through the people who live in the area. The purpose of the touring exhibition is:

To return to places that are linked to Ballymun through the stories of it's residents.

To collect stories from new places to bring back to Ballymun.

To explore the relative nature of a wide range of cities, towns and suburbs. And to expand on the dialogue

process that realised the initial work and develops new work as the tour develops.

In some way the tour in itself is a journey that will re-establish links and make new ones. The end of the process is it's final return to Ballymun.

OCT '06 //////////////////////////////////////

Talk in LAB around Collaborative Practice.

Installation of permanent work delayed.

NOV '06 //////////////////////////////////////

Recording part of presentation in Ballymun Library for Traveller Week.

MAR '07 //////////////////////////////////////

Discuss Stations of the Cross/ Apostiles with residents.

JUN '07 //////////////////////////////////////

Install Stations of the Cross.

SEP '07 //////////////////////////////////////

Install Apostles and prayers.

MAY '07 //////////////////////////////////////

Printed work installed in DIT Centre.

SEP '07 //////////////////////////////////////

Prepare work for new outdoor site.

OCT '07 //////////////////////////////////////

Install new outdoor work.

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Open Forum Meeting

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The following is a press release issued by St Margaret's Travellers Community Association about an open meeting discussing serious problems that were occurring on the halting site. This meeting influenced the way McLoughlin approached the project and the nature of the final work.

St. Margaret's Traveller's Community Association (SMTCA) is hosting an open forum meeting in St. Margaret's Park Halting Site at which residents, councillors, community groups and interested individuals will come together to raise awareness about the accommodation situation in Ballymun.

The public meeting will form part of a site visit by the Irish Traveller Movement (ITM) Accommodation Working Group

which meets every 6 weeks. These site visits serve to inform the ITM about accommodation problems local areas.

St. Margaret's Halting Site is a thirty bay halting site built in 1997. It is home to sixty three families. While twenty families are moving into standard housing in the next few months, the site will still remain overcrowded. As 74% of the population are under the age of twenty five, many of these young people will be starting families of their own over the next few years.

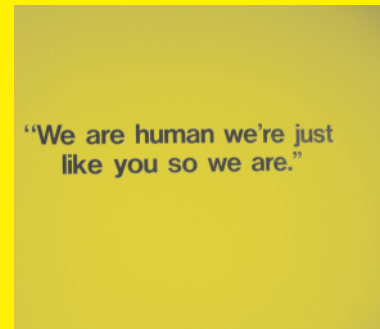
The Traveller Accommodation Programmes (TAPs) which arose out of the Traveller Accommodation Act, 1998, do not address the accommodation needs of Travellers in Ballymun at present, nor do they make provision for

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projected population figures. The submission drawn up by SMTCA was not taken into account in the Traveller Accommodation Programme 2005-2008.

There are a myriad of problems with which residents have to contend on a daily basis. The supply of electricity to the site is inadequate to cater for the amount of people living on the site, with



residents regularly being forced to live without heating, lighting, cooking facilities, fridges, freezers, washing machines etc. February 2006 saw fifteen families left for ten days without electricity in freezing conditions. In fact since November 2005 there have been over twenty incidents of families reporting that their electricity has gone off. Being forced to live without

Cont.

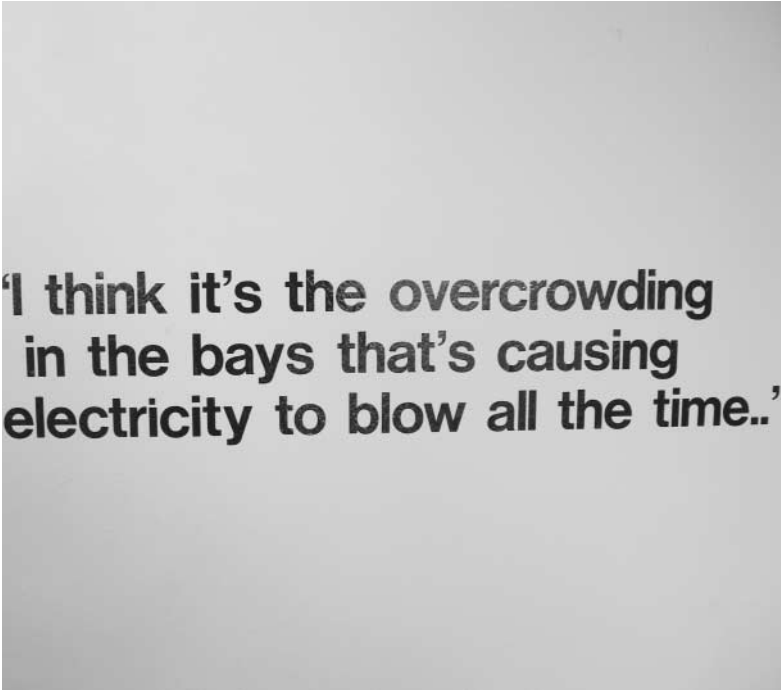
electricity in Ireland in 2006 is completely unacceptable and is an infringement of a basic human right. In addition to the electricity problem, there are problems on the site with blocked drains, broken showers, leaking toilets, burned sockets, no safe play area for children and pedestrian access to and from the site.

The face of Ballymun is changing, whether for better or worse, remains to be seen. Ballymun Regeneration Limited (BRL) is ploughing money into building houses and infrastructure in the Ballymun area. With the exception of twenty standard houses, Travellers do not fit into any overall picture in terms of their future accommodation needs. Plans are in the pipeline to build a massive Ikea store on land directly opposite the halting site land which is

urgently needed to cater for both present and future accommodation needs. As the busy roads and industrial warehouses encroach upon Travellers' living space, what exactly does the future hold for St. Margaret's?

These issues will be raised at the open forum meeting on Wednesday March 22nd at 1pm in the Community Centre in St. Margaret's Park, St. Margaret's Road, Ballymun.

Please contact either Caitriona or Siobhan if you wish to attend.



Installation At The Lab, Dublin.

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The work was first exhibited in The Lab on Foley Street, Dublin in September 2006. The title Welcome Back was appropriate to the place, as one story from the show, In the Shadow of Summerhill, related to the area around the gallery.

The exhibition involved a series of installed spaces relating to different aspects to the project. The main focus was the narratives, people's own testimonies and stories of movement in and through Ballymun.

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Welcome Back and Our Friends Electric installation view.



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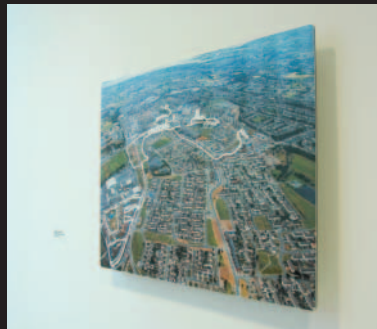


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1. Welcome Back Exhibition Sign

2. Where Are We Going To

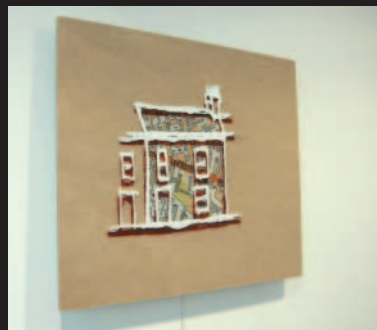
3. Our Friends Electric

4. Where We Are Going # 4

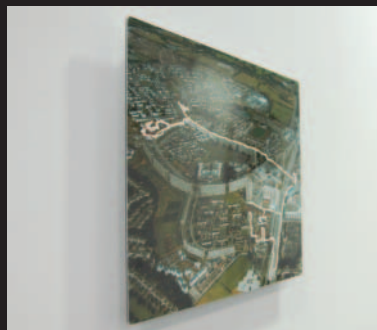
5. 42 Leicester Road

6. Where We Are Goin # 6

5



6



Where Are We Going # 1

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Lambda prints on diabond;
edition of 3
Size: 841mm x 1189mm



Where Are We Going # 2

39

Lambda prints on diabond;
edition of 3
Size: 841mm x 1189mm



Where Are We Going # 3

40

Lambda prints on diabond;
edition of 3
Size: 841mm x 1189mm



Where Are We Going # 4

41

Lambda prints on diabond;
edition of 3
Size: 841mm x 1189mm



Where Are We Going # 5

42

Lambda prints on diabond;
edition of 3
Size: 841mm x 1189mm



Where Are We Going # 6

43

Lambda prints on diabond;
edition of 3
Size: 841mm x 1189mm

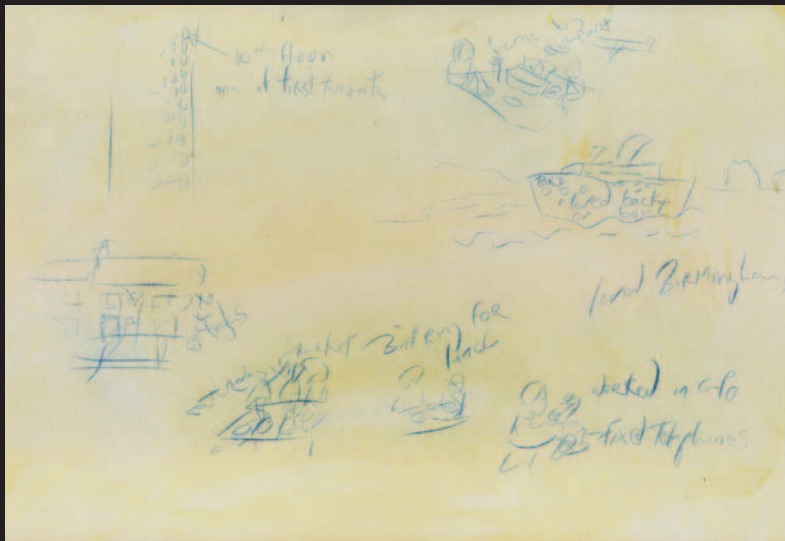


Where We Are Going To

44

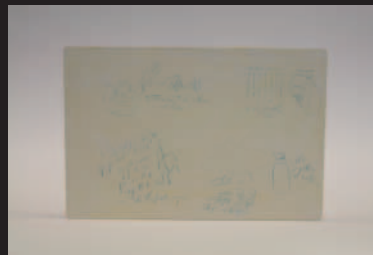
Most of the works in the Welcome Back exhibition have an audio element. There are no conventional speakers used in any of the twenty sound sources. They

all use exciters on the rear of the work (see below). This vibrates the surface slightly to produce the signal. In the series of drawings 'Where Did We Come



1

From' all fourteen drawings have an associated audio recording and have exciters attached. All fourteen are sequenced so they come and go at

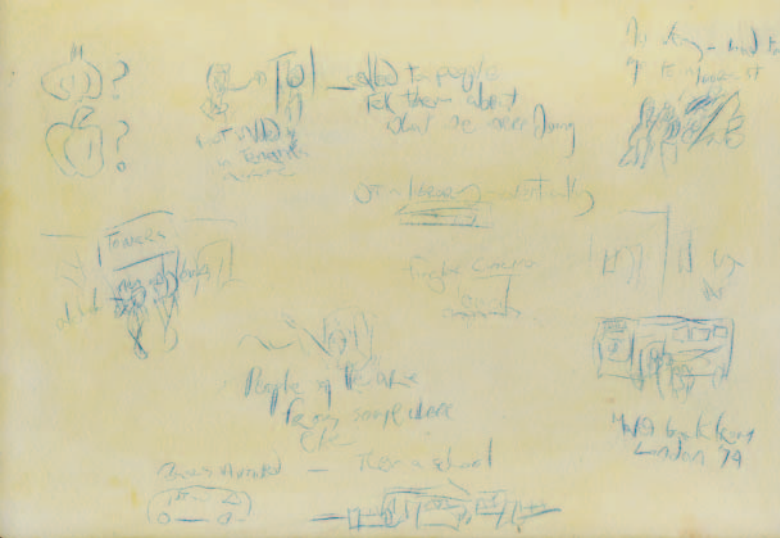


intervals allowing the sound to focus on different stories at different times. Each piece is a remembered journey to or through Ballymun. The drawings are made while listening back to the dialogues in question. They are quite literal illustrations of elements of the conversation.

1. Birmingham Ballymun Finglas (1 of 14)



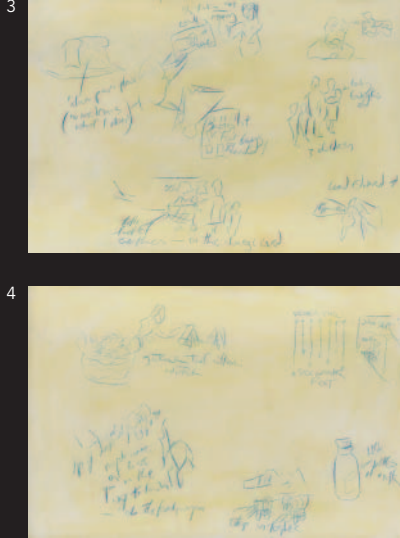
2. Cabra London Ballymun Ballybough



2

3. Edward Street Poppintree

4. Sligo Limerick Cork



4

5. Bratislava Osaka Ballymun

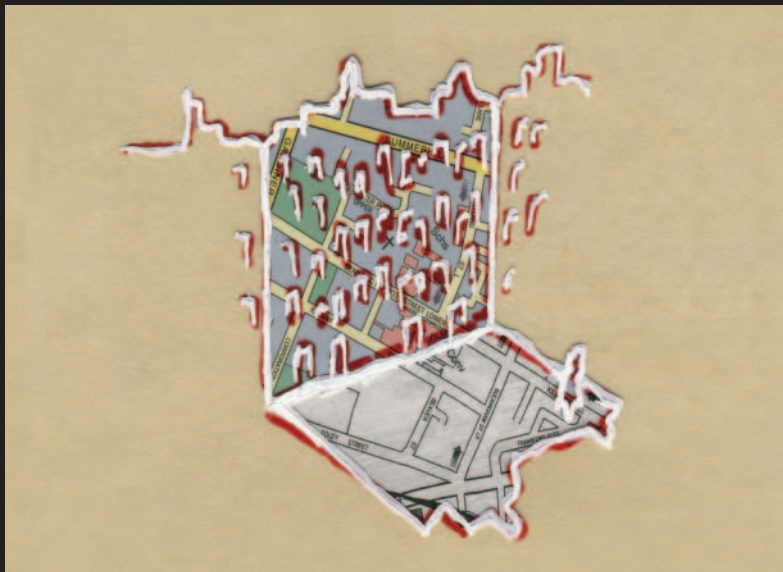


5

Shadow of Summerhill

48

Description of materials used
760mms x 560mms



Cowboy Wellies

49

Description of materials used
760mms x 560mms



42 Leicester Road

50

Description of materials used
760mms x 560mms



Our Friends Electric

51

Lambda print, LEDs and sequencer,
audio and foamex.
120cms diameter x 35cms



Long's Journey, 2006

5 minute projection and sound on prepared screen

52

Long's Journey is a combination of spoken and drawn narratives that chart how Long came to arrive in Ireland from China over twenty years ago. The work is in many ways a form of testimony. The piece is a matter-of-fact retelling of Long's story and it aims to reinforce the gravity of the journey he embarked on, from Kunming to Dublin.



53



Michael's mural work at St. Margaret's '08

Work in Progress

54

55



Residents mural work at St. Margaret's '08

56



57





Team:

60



Breaking Ground Team
Paul McAree
Art Projects Manager
Denise Reddy
Assistant Project Manager



Artist
Michael McLoughlin

