Rua Red, Tallaght

Open Minds

An exhibition of work by people in custody 2019

06 Sept — 05 Oct 2019

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Day 1

PACE

In April and May 2019 Brian Maguire visited prisons and education and training centres to select work for Open Minds. This is his diary of those visits.

A big house in the north city, somehow surviving both economic boom and bust, hides a vast rear garden with polytunnels, sheds, and fabrication workshops. A beautiful morning; there was a busy quiet industry at work here, with products – planted-up flower boxes - being prepared for dispatch. We get nods but little conversation, due, I figure, to men meeting deadlines. The garden-centred, training unit is a production unit building boxes and growing flowers, servicing real contracts, for Dublin City Council. At the rear of the garden there is a small timber shed which houses a ceramics workshop where we met the teacher who brought us through various works produced recently. The students had not come from prison so we did not meet the artists. We saw the work, a series, just short of a dozen, of unique ceramic and wooden towers approximately sixty centimetres tall with a fingerprint design cut into each tower: a complex work demonstrating an ironic take on personal identity, its acceptance and denial, within a public context. This was the first work we saw on the route to this exhibition and it created significant excitement as to the standard of work we expect to encounter.

Driving on through dense housing, Tom Shortt (Arts Development Officer for the Irish Prison Education Service) and I found a small industrial unit in Santry where a PACE workshop is located, a metal and wood workshop on the ground floor with offices. A few men were working there that morning. We were there to see a large metal and timber triangle with cast bronze faces attached in the centre. Made with railway sleepers and bent metal rails, the structure stood ten feet tall. Nothing ironic here: the piece reflects the theme of men working together on large engineering projects, thus the railway tracks and wooden sleepers, accurate in its simplicity, power, and sensitivity. The artist and a number of men met us. They had that sense of pride that comes from simple achievement.



First Impressions, installation, Priorswood House, Anon



First Impressions, installation, Priorswood House, Anon

Open Minds

Curated by
Brian Maguire

Contributing Prisons

Arbour Hill Prison, Castlerea Prison, Cloverhill Prison, Cork Prison, Dochas Women's Centre, Limerick Prison, Loughan House Open Prison, Midlands Prison, Mountjoy Prison, Portlaoise Prison, Progression Unit Mountjoy Campus, Shelton Abbey Open Prison, Wheatfield Prison, PACE Education and Training Centre, Priorswood House, Coolock, PACE Training for Employment Centre, Santry.

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Graphic Design

Distinctive Repetition

Photography

Colour photography by Eugene Langan.

These four walls have me trapped like a rat.
These four walls surround me, threatening to drown me.
These four walls, sapping my strength, until nothing makes sense.
These four walls, my prison, my cell, my cage, my hell.
These four walls, my pit of doom, my despair, my gloom.
These four walls, filled with my depression, built to teach me a lesson.
A never ending detention, an invention, craven with intentions
    To have me second-guessing my intentions.
So why ask these questions?
If these four walls want to break me, can they in turn make me?
Were these four walls built to help me come to terms with my guilt?
Without these four walls, would I survive the life that tried to eat me alive?
Did these four walls select me to save and protect me?
Will I leave these four walls happier, because they made me better than I was?
Are these four walls educating me to hold on to the hope that tried escaping me?
These four walls, my saviour, my salvation from damnation, my education
    About the devastation of temptation.
These four walls, my friends, my team, my new eyes from the previously unseen,
    My new hopes, my new dreams, my new chance to be clean.
    These four walls.
These four enlightening walls, never to be missed, only to be missed out on, to be remembered,
    To remind me, I can't let myself fall.
My four walls, I won't break you four walls.
You won't break me four walls. Four walls, you won't break me.
You can't break me, I won't let you.

Cloverhill Prison, Anon



Prison window, acrylics on canvas, Cloverhill, Anon

Open Space, Open Minds

The arts give us a better understanding of ourselves and the world that we live in. At Rua Red we approach this through a programme that puts people, politics, and place at the forefront of everything we deliver. We create programmes that are deeply relevant to our community, programmes that initiate significant conversations and discussion around important and sometimes difficult issues that need to be highlighted and spoken about.

At Rua Red we are not afraid to engage with concerns; we give voice to those who need to be heard and listened to. We open our doors to all, we are not elitist, nor austere: we engage, create access, and enable.

It is for these reasons that when Tom Shortt and Brian Maguire approached myself and my team to collaborate in this exhibition, we embraced it. For us it is vital that we support all artists at every stage of their career and also exhibit work that is produced within a social or political context; work that questions, stimulates, and pushes boundaries. As a director and curator I have always believed that galleries should make a difference to their community through engagement, as neutral spaces where vital and sometimes challenging conversations take place.

We welcome Brian Maguire as the exhibition's curator. Maguire consistently puts social justice and the importance of the silenced voice at the forefront of all of his work.

He has worked as artist and educator within the prison system for years and developing the practice of many beyond the prison walls in his own genius way. Maguire has a unique, sensitive insight into the individual personalities within the work; their voice and intent. It has also been a pleasure working with Tom Shortt, Arts Development Officer for the Prison Education Service who has relentless commitment and dedication to the individuals he works with. Both Shortt and Maguire bring an abundance of energy and banter to the project.

The artists involved are the strength of this show. However, despite their anonymity, each distinctive personality emerges through the individual works and styles, filling the space with their presence.

Special thanks to The Irish Prison Service, in particular to Kieran Moylan, Margaret Cafferkey and Aoife Doyle in Care and Rehabilitation Directorate Rehabilitation Directorate. This exhibition marks a new chapter in the Arts in Prison scheme that has been supported by the Arts Council for over thirty years. Thanks also to the dedicated Rua Red team who inject their energy and curiosity into all they undertake.

Maolíosa Boyle,
Executive Director, Rua Red,
South Dublin Arts Centre.



I AM, acrylic on canvas, Wheatfield, Anon



Untitled, pencil, Wheatfield, Anon

A note from the Director General

The biennial exhibition of creative works by people in custody and post-release centres provides an opportunity to showcase the diverse range of arts, crafts and creative works produced in Prison Education Centres and Post-Release Centres.

The Prison Education Service provided in partnership with the Education and Training Boards, operates within a philosophy of second chance or adult education, leading to more positive futures for students which will reduce their chances of returning to custody.
The agreed vision is 'A prison education service based on self-respect and respect for others, within a safe, supportive learning environment.'

The theme of this exhibition was chosen to highlight the role of adult and continuing education, in opening all of our minds to new capabilities, talents and opportunities. Engaging in the creative arts gives people in custody a direct and intimate opportunity for expression and self-encounter. By learning the skills associated with the arts, individuals in custody uncover aspects of their own potential as creative persons and for some this may provide a future career opportunity.

The creative arts programme in Irish prisons, supported by the Arts Council is striking in terms

of its positive benefits, including its broad range and depth. The environment of the prisons' creative arts classes allows students to reflect, explore and to be creative. Many students enrol for these subjects as an introduction or re-introduction to education and this often leads into learning in other subject areas. Students can create art works to send home or bring with them on release and it is a means of re-connecting with families and friends.

It is recognised that participation in artistic projects and the process of creating artwork can transform people in custody, acting as a catalyst for positive attitudinal and psychological changes. The exhibition theme invites viewers to approach the exhibition with an open mind and to see beyond the person who has a conviction. Bringing the works into the public arena at Rua Red and at the Hunt Museum is a reminder to us that people in prison have not simply disappeared but are still part of the community to which they will return.

I wish to commend all involved in the creation of the art works included in this exhibition. I wish to congratulate the artists, their teachers, the curator, administrators and the Prison Service staff for making this exhibition possible.

Caron McCaffrey,
Director General, Irish Prison Service.



Other Worlds II, acrylics on canvas, Wheatfield, Anon



Day 2

Limerick

Limerick Prison is located near enough to the centre of Limerick city, its front gate a few yards from the footpath. You are admitted to a guardhouse that opens to a courtyard across which lies the main entrance to the jail. Here you encounter a slight jolt, as the door holds original pieces of stained glass while across the corridor is a ceramic artwork, resplendent in high colour. These two gestures recall for me the ceramic works in Valencia Prison in Spain, the legacy of a visit by Picasso many years ago. We proceed further into the Prison to the school where there is a fabric-sewing workshop. Men worked with sewing machines in class and in their cells. A small industry atmosphere was present. Repair work for girlfriends' bags was also a current engagement. This craftwork was of a very high standard of finish and had captured the imagination of a sizable group of men. In a nearby painting studio images, including football crests, were produced to decorate cells. Outside, one of the teachers – who, incidentally, is a fine musician – was repairing a sculpture installed some years ago. Following from this visit we reviewed a series of works from Loughan House Open Prison and from Cloverhill Prison. There were sensitive drawings on newsprint of Republican leaders from the period 1916 to 1922. Landscapes also figured in this work.



Origami birds, paper, Dochas, Anon



Origami birds, paper, Dochas, Anon

Day 3

Arbour Hill and The Dochas Centre

We entered the prison at Arbour Hill just as President Higgins arrived for the annual commemoration event at the national shrine next door. Entry to the prison was through two large doors, the size of trucks, very similar to that which pertains in Mountjoy Jail. The school is reached across some internal yards open here to Dublin's ever-present rain. The rooms in the school are of domestic size, off a long corridor with dozens of framed paintings. We visited two rooms full of men working. The first is an art room where painting on paper is the main activity. The men work sitting around a large table. The atmosphere is quiet and industrious. There are 3D models of homes also on show. The second room is a pottery workshop where up to ten men work at a time. This is a very energetic space where the students are engaged in a group project in which each person creates, sizes, paints, glazes and fires a ten centimetre square which go to form a mural of eighty tiles. The imagination demonstrated and the visceral quality of these works is wonderful.

The second visit of day three was to the Women's Prison at Mountjoy, the Dochas Centre. After a brisk walk through the different craft rooms we met the art teacher who had two works of extraordinary quality displayed. The first was one of origami birds, over a thousand of them, each different, each handmade, with the sequential number written on one wing and the date on the other. The sequential numbering relates each day of her sentence. The delicacy and beauty of this work is a counterpoint equal to the size and effect of the total presence of Mountjoy Jail. The second work is a series of three books of drawings which use coloured automatic drawing; each page an imaginative world: strong, confident, and very beautiful drawings that could cover a basketball pitch if laid side by side. The last work was a series of intense expressionist paintings that carried a sense of the frenetic environment that is prison. These works were shown to us in a storeroom next to the classroom where we met some of the women who make art there. The Women's Prison, separate from the main Mountjoy jail, is entered by its own door. As in all prisons you go through airport type security, gaining progress by showing photo identification and having belongings scanned. Phones, cameras and digital cards are not permitted. This process is sometimes fast, sometimes slow, sometimes facilitated with humour, sometimes in silence, with professional respect. It's the same as in an airport but my feelings are more confused, as one thing is certain: we are not travelling anywhere. It is one of the occasions when a dialogue can occur with the officers.



Eye, mixed media on paper, Priorswood House, Anon



Untitled, markers, Dochas, Anon

Untitled, markers, Dochas, Anon



Day 4

Mountjoy

We visit Mountjoy Jail. The morning is spent in the Progression Unit, a bright cheerful building that could be in any college in the country. Its outside holds a carefully manicured grass area. Here, men prepare through education and support for release programs. The atmosphere is sober and optimistic. The art room is busy and work is laid out on easels with the men presenting their work. A strikingly original painting of a group of men with their faces blurred is at the end of the room. It is a confident work that conveys a sense of different personalities and physical presence without showing the individual features. I was amazed to hear that it was the first painting made by the artist. We saw work using hard edge and heard of a large piece titled 'Gatefever' which we saw the following week in Wheatfield Prison. There was a sense of purpose in the interactions in this unit with conversations on continuing education prior to full release and following release. The contemporary feel of the building is in contrast to the large nineteenth century architecture next door.

In the afternoon we went to the school in Mountjoy Jail. A small art room, unchanged in thirty years, overlooks the prison yards with one window. The room is busy with men conversing, who, in the normal run of events, don't meet. As in all the rooms we visited there is individual work that shows talent. Collaborative works were in train. One man had completed works on canvas based on movies. Another had seen the Sean Scully documentary on television and had produced a very simple and beautiful blue painting based on squares. This is how one learns: the Scully documentary inspired abstract painting all over Ireland. It is interesting to see the lack of difference in the responses to the film from both inside and outside prison.



Untitled, charcoal, Loughan House, Anon



For you to be here, sculpture, Castlerea, Anon

Day 5

Castlerea

A long avenue brings one to the entrance of Castlerea Prison. The gate is less imposing than others we recently visited. We are met by a friendly remark at the search area. Once inside the wall there is a long walkway that is sheltered from the rain, again as in an airport. We first walk across what feels like fields – but aren't – to a set of cottages known as the Grove. The artwork here is mainly exercised through the craft of felt making but while there we found a man with drawings, carefully made, of his father. These men are republicans. We chatted much as I had a lot of experience with republican prisoners some years ago. The Grove consists of houses that were used to hold republican prisoners after the Good Friday releases. They are unusual in an Irish setting as they are ordinary domestic dwellings. In southern Europe such a facility is used for family visits over a weekend. The Anglo, north European culture does not permit such intimacy. In the prison's main building we found an exciting art room with sculpture made with plaster that dealt with a visit by a family member. The plaster-covered, empty, white chair faces across a table to the torso – no head – of the female visitor. I felt that this distils an anonymous visit. Why, I can't say, but still poignant.



Untitled, painting, Midlands, Anon





About the experience of violence and violence as the destruction of experience.

Hadrien Laroche



Untitled, oil, Portlaoise, Anon

1

I met Brian Maguire in Cork but it was Rachael Gilbourne, a curator and art critic, then working at the Kerlin Gallery, who took me one day to Brian's studio in Paris. The three of us spent an afternoon together: the messy courtyard with cobblestone and woodwork, the steep staircase to the workshop, the big room and the small kitchen, the pictures placed against the ground and the work in progress on the walls. Then, at night, we went for a drink at the bar at the end of the street; I could see the sunset in the canal water reflected in the mirror above her face framed by auburn hair curls.

2

Then I saw Brian again, often at La Fontaine de Belleville, where they make the best croque-monsieur of Paris; he was interested in my essay on the politics of Jean Genet, *The Last Genet* (Arsenal Pulp Press, 2010). During twenty years (1968–86), the French writer met parties and movements and the men who made them: the Black Panthers in the United States, the Red Army Faction in Germany, the Palestinians in the Middle East. Everywhere he went, he saw the disinherited. 'When I finished with writing', Genet said, 'I was thirty-four, thirty-five years old. But that was a dream. It was in any case a daydream, a reverie. I wrote in prison. Once I became free, I was lost. And I didn't find myself again in reality, in the real world, until I was with two revolutionary movements, the Black Panthers and the Palestinians. And so I submitted myself to the real world. I was acting in relation to the real world and no longer to the grammatical world.

At the heart of this policy I discovered an orphan; more precisely: a childhood with political consequences and a policy that filled the void of childhood.'

3

Art and activism are antagonists. Art is creation; activism is reaction. Why even try to relate the artist and the activist? Because the activist enters the field of aesthetics and wants to judge art. He judges art in relation to his ideology: Maoism, Islamism, Feminism … , you name it. Today, works of art (exhibitions, films, books), are judged in the light of #MeToo, for example, that is to say, according to the 'hairdresser justice' as Angélica Liddell wrote; the activist needs a cause to fill the void of his life. However, I do not want to judge art according to beauty either, nor beauty nor ideology. To me, the work of art has the characteristic of witchcraft: through the object of art comes the presence of a disseminated person. I understand the artwork as a living non-human (just like forests, oceans or animals). Maguire is also close to an understanding of art as magic. Maguire posits that to take a photograph of somebody or to paint someone is to steal from them in some way, even to the point of abuse. That is something that requires the artist to pay back a debt to the subject.

4

Importance of negative lyricism: critical, dialectical, lyricism of the other. In a situation in which social relations have so much power over the individual, his freedom is illusion and

the aesthetic communication of this freedom - personal lyricism - is ideology. On the other hand, there is no collective that would be able to provide lyrical content with more authority than private content. Hence, according to the philosopher Adorno, 'The artist must completely abandon the idea of a positive lyricism, and forms in its place, in a radical way, a negative lyricism.'

5

Now: why did I accept the invitation of Brian Maguire? First, because he asked me to write something about his exhibition *Open Minds*. He suggested that I write in a catalog about the work he does within prisons in Ireland, political and non-political prisoners. So, I said yes. I write to get out of prison. Prison of my body, of my mind – prison of identity. In my eyes, every sign, every memory and every dream is an element of the puzzle whose resolution will provide me with a 'plan of escape', because it is only a question of escaping the conspiracy of normality. I also write to please myself and relieve myself of the pain.

6

'I had been trying for four months to enter the Prison' Brian Maguire once said about the famous Carandiru prison in Brazil, which he finally got into, thanks to a friend of his. The Governor of the Prison immediately warned him: ' … you can go anywhere, but if someone decides to take you hostage, we will go and in shoot everybody, including you.'



Shaman, photo montage, Mountjoy, Anon

As I write – July 19 2019 – at least fifty-seven people have been killed in a gruesome gang battle that broke out in the prison of Altamira in the state of Pará in the Brazilian Amazon. Officials said a local drug gang had invaded the wing controlled by its rivals in the city, decapitated sixteen prisoners and set mattresses on fire, with dozens more thought to have been asphyxiated in the smoke. Two guards were held hostage and later released. The screams could be heard in the neighbouring airport. The prison held three hundred and forty-three prisoners, more than twice its capacity, the *Guardian* reported. It could be, that Brian Maguire aims, with his art, *to enter prison* (which is not the same as going to jail).

7

Maguire is curating and putting together an exhibition of creative arts by people in custody that will be shown at Rua Red Arts Centre and the Hunt Museum. Here are works from inmates of various prisons: from a workshop with Artist Cathy Carmen at Castlerea Prison; from Cloverhill prison; from Cork Prison; from Dochas Women's Centre (three sketchbooks full of strange, new, monstrous creatures which reminds me of the ones you find in Jérôme Bosch's paintings, *The Garden of Earthly Delights* (1494–1505); butterfly-shaped paper origami, whose wings are numbered, each corresponding to one day's imprisonment (all detainees count the days spent in jail with delight); from Loughan House (a representation of a boxer who fights against a punchbag but also an opponent painted like a mural); from Midlands Prison; from Priorswood House (a sculpture made of hollow wood on which is printed the fingerprints

of the artist: I'll come back to that); from Mountjoy (a great photo montage of impeccable composition showing owls and kids and a veiled woman); from Portlaoise Prison (*Shaman*: an extraordinary collage on a background of colorful meadows and peasants, with monsters rising from the sky, a giant bird with a beak wide open and, in the foreground, an Native American peasant woman, or Inca, or Amerindian (itself in a frame) which gives the whole piece a very controlled, colourful, and fantastic pace); from Shelton Abbey Open Prison; from Wheatfield Prison (*Other Worlds II*: a work full of animals, eyes and symbols); from Arbour Hill (*Hands*, a family of seven represented by seven different hands made in various media - wood, plastic, wire); from Cloverhill Prison (the portrait - from a workshop with Artist Sean Molloy – entitled *Free State* that shows a stern man who evokes a Brownshirt or some authoritarian leader); from Dochas (the uncanny *Day of the Dead* series); from Loughan House; from Midlands Prison (*Notre-Dame burning*: well, this one rings a bell, if you will allow the expression); from Wheatfield Prison (a remarkable pencil work). I wonder how many punitive institutions they have in Ireland.

8

The work of Maguire, vis-à-vis the prisoners, is very fine, very subtle, very simple. Bring jail to art, bring art to jail, says the head of the women's prison in Chelsea, New York, *à propos* Maguire's intervention. But Brian is not saying that.
He says: '*I am interested* [I underline] in the humanity of the prisoners and the inhumanity of prison … when I meet these people they are unarmed. By the time I work with some prisoners they are already looking for a way out. I am trying



72 ceramic tiles, Arbour Hill, Anon



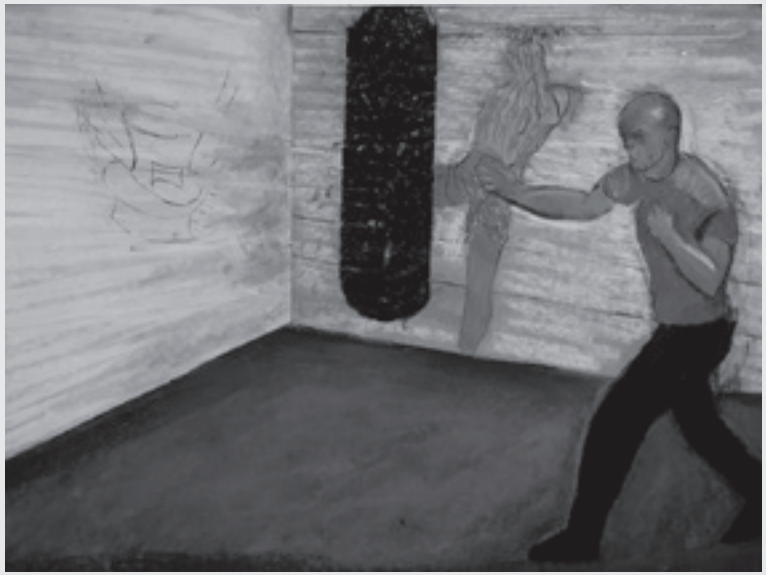


Untitled, ceramic plate, Cork, Anon

to communicate that painting is a means of resistance, albeit a legal one.' Drawing children and teaching children to draw, like he did in the favelas, is part of the same gesture. In Juarez, he systematically paints two pictures of his subject; the one he offers to his model or its family (when the model is gone or dead (the women of Juarez), the other to exhibit. The painting he leaves on the spot is generally more cheerful than the one he carries, as it seems. All these gestures belong to the same, let's say, method. He does it against invisibility; the inmates still have no names, the prison authorities forbid prisoners to sign their work. In Long Kesh Prison the British wanted the work to remain private; 'Their view was that they didn't mind me painting the prisoners but not in public, they didn't want any kind of display. They wanted them to disappear … ' Brian says. By writing, Genet wanted to become transparent; I try to both disseminate my name and erase my signature. Some of the inmates here found a substitute for their signature: one reproduced his fingerprints; another (a woman) has noted every day that remains to be in prison (from there, you can go back to the jail sentence and deduce the identity of this woman); I wonder who she is (will I ever know?).

9

It is not uncommon that thoughtful men and artists have noted a feeling of not being quite present, of not being part of, of being kind of spectator. This shocks the bourgeois and the humanists. I am suspicious of emotions, good feelings and empathy. Empathy suffocates me, to tell the truth. I believe that it's still in the '*it's not that important*' which resemble the bourgeois coldness, that the individual can still



Untitled, pastels, Loughan House, Anon

experience the inanity of existence. This facility to distance oneself and become spectator, is finally more human than what the ideologues are offering us. The spectator attitude expresses at the same time the following doubt: how can all this exist? Today, we have the choice between a forced ataraxia or indifference, and the stupidity of the one who is involved. Both are false lives. But it would take a little of both to make a real *désinvolture*, a real sympathy. What I call indifference here means no judgment. 'Have you noticed that Beckett never judged anyone?' he says. Brian Maguire is very plain: 'I worked with whoever was in front of me, regardless of their offense.'

10

Student, Eddie Cahill, once said: 'And Maguire comes in. And I say: But where's the art teacher?' He looked like another prisoner …'

11

Who are we talking about? Born of a Northern Irish family in 1951, in the early years of the troubles, he joined the leftist 'Official' republican movement, from which the militant 'Provisionals' split in 1969. In 1979 Maguire started to paint autobiographical scenes based on memories from his years of socialist republican activity. He went from a curative need to paint and exorcises these memories, to more objective observations of his personal history, to other's people violence. 'After I cleaned up my act, I began to paint my past, starting with the personal stuff, and mobbing on to the

Troubles, the war, the society', he says. When the Officials in turn split with a rebel group opposing the ceasefire and forming the Irish National Liberation Army, Maguire stayed put: 'I had known enough politics not to be part of the Provos, and by the time the second split came, I knew enough about violence not to be part of that.' Therefore, the question of this present exhibition – or maybe of every work of art – could be: What to do with the experience of violence, if violence is the destruction of experience?

12

A war artist? He has to be there, to bear witness. 'There is something about sharing a space with the people who are there that enables you to have some ownership of the images', he says. Like Genet, he went to Aleppo in Jordan and planned a visit to refugees in Lebanon: at the time they were Palestinians, today they come from Syria and Iraq. In Ciudad Juárez he paints the portraits of young victims of the atrocious *feminocidio*, mass murder of women (by necessity, from photos): for each girl, he made one picture for the exhibition and a second, usually brighter, as a donation for the mother, as I mentioned above. After four years, it was over. He says: 'It's worthless, it's meaningless, it's nothing.' He went from Paris to Brindisi, across to Athens, and back through Macedonia, Serbia, Slovenia, Austria, Germany, to travel the route the migrants has taken: 'I didn't meet that much, it provided little direct material, but it was a necessary pilgrimage' he says, (the result was a picture of a drowning man conveyed both vertically and horizontally against the predatory sea that claims his life). Brian Maguire is not the first artist to try to bridge the gap between art and life.

As we know, art has nothing to do with life and real life is art. Brian Maguire is interested in 'arts that live on the intimacy of life itself'. He found this intimacy in the various incarcerated groups on the island of Ireland, from mental hospitals to prison. Maguire's initial focus and geographic interest widened to embrace the disenfranchised and the disposed in São Paulo's favela, Nairobi's slums, Mexico's Ciudad Juárez. One day, a journalist asked Genet if he had helped the Palestinians. He answered: 'Help the Palestinians? What a joke! They are the ones who helped me.'

13

The last time I saw Brian it was at the invitation of the Irish Cultural Center in Paris for a conversation between us as part of a residency for artists and academics dedicated to art and activism. It was called *Burning the Bush*. I recalled a few words of my intervention on this subject above. Then, towards the end, I remember, a question from a participant about the reason of Brian's commitment, he answered: 'When I lost my father I started to understand what life is and what the world is about. I started to look at the dead in the world. I do not believe most of what I hear' (maybe a recollection of George Orwell's famous statement in *Homage to Catalonia* where Orwell says that in the Spanish Civil War he believes nothing of what he reads and only that which his own eyes show him).



Day of the Dead, mixed media on cardboard, Dochas, Anon

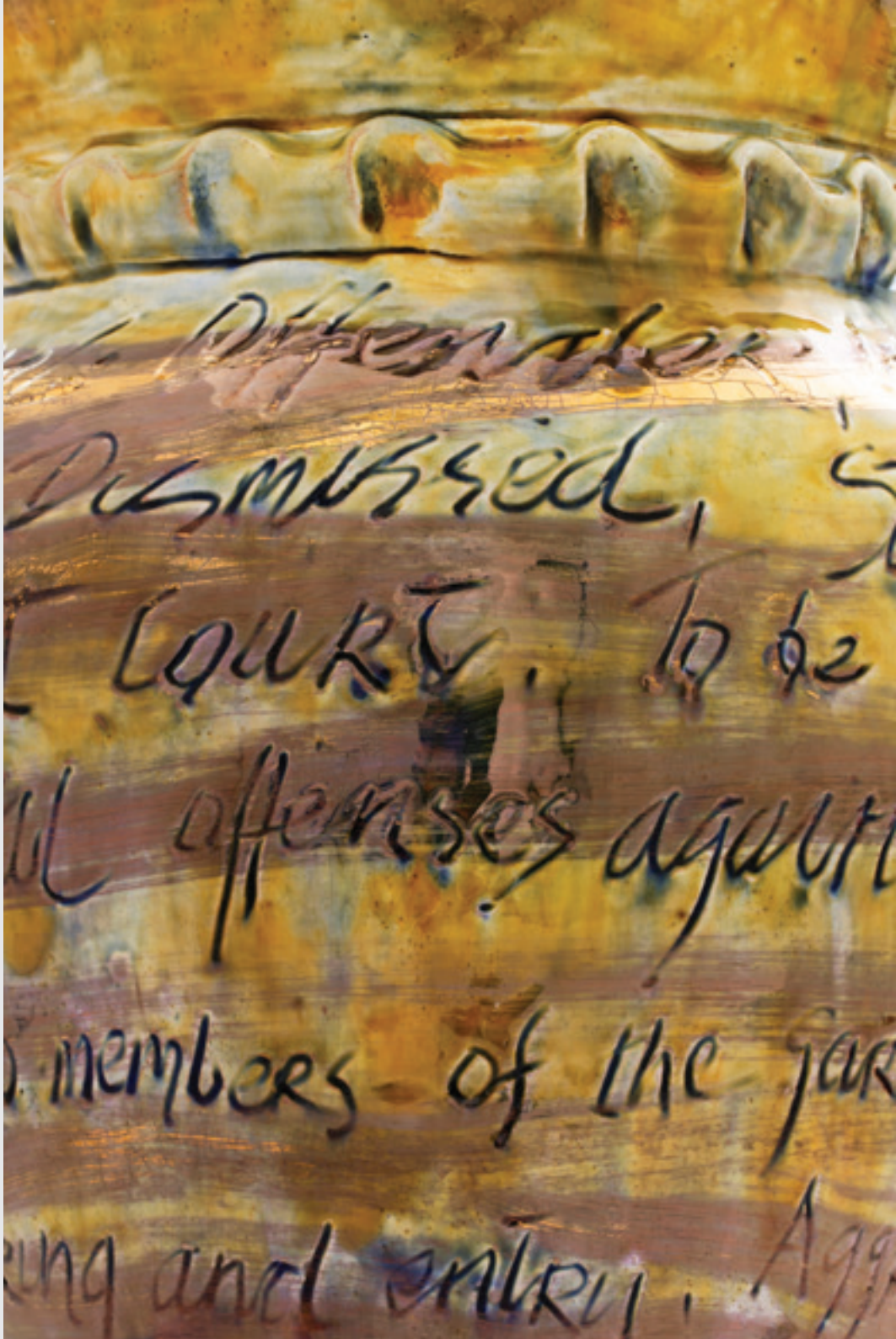
14

Fyodor Dostoyevsky published *House of the Dead*, his semi-autobiographical novel, in 1860–2. It's an account of the author's four years of imprisonment in one of Siberia's Katorga labour camps, following his conviction for involvement in the Petrashevsky Circle and his mock execution, on 22 December 1849. It portrays the life of convicts in a Siberian prison camp. On the last page, when the narrator comes out of prison, I read: 'Yes, farewell! Liberty! New life! Resurrection from the dead! Unspeakable moment!'

Acknowledgement

Thanks to Brian Maguire and to all involved in the exhibition, in particular Tom Shortt and Maolíosa Boyle. Unless otherwise stated, all quotations come from *Brian Maguire: essays by Gavin Delahunty, Ed Vulliamy, Thomas McEvilley, Donald Kuspitt; extended captions by Ed Vulliamy* (Fergus McCaffrey: Kerlin Gallery, 2018), in particular the remarkable essay by Ed Vulliamy, 'From His Own Eyes; a Message of War and Struggle'. For further reading of my work of fiction and on Genet, see, *The Last Genet, a Writer in Revolt*, translated by David Homel, (Arsenal Pulp Press, 2010); *Orphans*, translated by Jan Steyn, (Dalkey Archive Press, 2010). George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia*, chapter 14: 'It is difficult to be certain about anything except what you have seen with your own eyes, and consciously or unconsciously everyone writes as a partisan. In case I have not said this somewhere earlier in the book I will say it now: beware of my partisanship, my mistakes of fact, and the distortion inevitably caused by my having seen only one corner of events. And beware of exactly the same things when you read any other book on this period of the [Spanish] war.'

HL





72 ceramic tiles, Arbour Hill, Anon

Day 6

Wheatfield

Wheatfield Prison is approached from within the town. It's hard to find, as there are no road signs guiding you until you chance upon its car park. You enter through a door next to a large gate used by prison transport. The school is situated within the prison, its classrooms off a wide corridor. The art room was busy and I met a calligrapher I had worked with around twenty years ago. We had both aged but it was very good to meet and exchange a little on the years gone by. I met two young men who were in their first hours of eighteen-month sentences and in our conversation their shock at where they were and determination to keep it to one sentence came to the surface. What a contrast: one man in prison over thirty years and two others in prison just thirty minutes. Yet the reflections of the three had a similar tone. The two newcomers were utterly determined never to be so stupid as to land up in this situation again. They were shocked at what had come to play. None of the three seemed to blame others for their circumstances. We were shown a community project involving many teachig staff and students but did not meet any students who had worked on the project.

Untitled, markers, Dochas, Anon





Sweet Jesus, spray paint, Shelton Abbey, Anon

Day 7

Shelton Abbey

Again, a long driveway in to Shelton Abbey that is, as its name suggests, a gothic building with an abundance of turrets. The lawns surrounding this open prison are lit up by the sun on a beautiful day. Men are scattered about enjoying the warmth. There is a recruiting meeting between the men and local employers. In the art room a display of a set of stone-patterned works and others based on graffiti, show a high level of activity. Next door, the woodwork class is going strong. Here I meet one man who came into my class in Portlaoise in 1986. I remembered him as very withdrawn then. Today we had a long conversation about mutual acquaintances and how life had evolved for us over the thirty years. I enjoyed very much meeting him. This prison is the last step before release and it was very gratifying to see how this one man had survived and gained the capacity to function in society. We know many who do not make it.



Untitled, glazed pot, Cork, Anon



Untitled, Acrylics on canvas, Cloverhill, Anon

Day 8

Cork

Cork Prison is situated above the city. Entry - as in all the others – is through an airport-like search area. We are met by an officer and brought to the school. As it is a new prison, with each wide corridor resembling the next, it is easy to lose one's bearings. I got lost, as I did years ago in the H Blocks, as in both places one unit was the same as another. Wonderful paintings and large drawings were laid out for us to see around the Circle, the huge open funnel that rises up through the centre of the prison.

A lively art class brought me into conversations with some men. Memories of Corkmen I had worked with in the past surfaced and I was told how they were doing well. This helped join up the dots going back over the thirty years for me. I had worked with the staff there in 1988 and 1989 and they were still here and looking younger, somehow. We selected many works including some brilliant pottery. At lunch we met a released man to view his work and discussed with him a programme of education for the following few years. He will make an animated film for the show. There is a fine atmosphere in this school in Cork.



Untitled, wall collage, Dochas, Anon



Birds of Prey, ceramic tile, Wheatfield, Anon





Prisoners, acrylics on canvas, Mountjoy, Anon

Day 9

Portlaoise

Portlaoise Prison is located along the Dublin Road in the town of Portlaoise. The new blocks are recently built, while the E Block, housing political prisoners, is an old cut-stone, four story, rectangular building. Here we met men on the third and fourth landings. Very similar to the Long Kesh H Blocks, the landings, where the workshops are located, are covered with Republican ideological statements, both written and image. The hunger strikers and various historical figures from Irish independence struggles are in evidence in canvas. The numbers seem small when compared to my time here thirty years before. The timber and stone-carving workshops are going strong. While there are paintings everywhere, there seems to be no unfinished or part-finished work in E Block, which is unusual. It indicates that the practice of painting is not as present as it was. In the art room in A Block there is evidence of a thorough engagement with a number of self-critical works, focussing on identity. One work, from this, focussed on a person of Irish parents born in the United Kingdom, another on the identity of addiction. One aspect of prison life in Ireland is the number of European Union citizens incarcerated and the new forms of religious belief, particularly eastern orthodox Christianity, that finds expression in the art room. These new buildings, Block A and Block C, are in the centre of the old prison.



Untitled, ceramic sculpture, Midlands, Anon



Untitled, oil on canvas, Portlaoise, Anon

Making Open Minds

While the theory of education is undoubtedly important, imagination, initiative and acts of faith are needed to form contexts where individual and collective learning can happen. This proved to be the case in the genesis of Open Minds, the most recent of the Irish Prison Education Service's biennial art exhibitions.

In planning the exhibition it was clear that the varied interests of the Irish Prison Service, students and teachers needed to be considered and, in that, the choice of a curator to structure and direct the project would be critical. As a pioneer of art education in prisons in the 1980s and 90s, head of the faculty of Fine Art at the National College of Art and Design in the 2000s, and a distinguished artist renowned internationally for his compassionate dissection of human rights issues, including incarceration, Brian Maguire was an obvious choice. When approached in October 2017, he readily agreed to take on the task. As support for the project grew, it found approval with Michael Donnellan, Director General of the Irish Prison Service. The hope of holding the exhibition in a publicly funded space was realised when Maolíosa Boyle, a director of the Bloody Sunday Trust and a curator of the Turner Prize in Derry in 2013, offered Rua Red, where she is director. Boyle defines Rua Red as a space for international contemporary art focussed on work developed within a social and political framework: 'the work exhibited at Rua Red is a response to the ethos of people, politics and place'. Serving a diverse community that includes Cloverhill and Wheatfield Prisons, with superb administrative and technical staff, impressive spaces, and a Luas stop outside, Rua Red is an ideal venue.



The Yard Sentinels, acrylic on canvas, Wheatfield, Anon

An offer to show the exhibition from Naomi O'Nolan, Head of Exhibitions at the Hunt Museum in Limerick, and a longtime supporter of prisoner art, ensured that it would reach an even bigger audience.

The support of the forty art teachers in the Prison Education Service would be critical and the project was proposed to them at a professional development day coinciding with the opening of Maguire's solo exhibition, *The Aleppo Paintings*, at the Irish Museum of Modern Art in January 2018. Over the following eighteen months the teachers directed, encouraged and supported their students while practicing artists visited the prisons to demonstrate their techniques and ideas in workshops funded by the Visual Artists in Prisons Scheme. Maguire then visited the prisons to meet prisoners and teachers and to see work in the context in which it was produced. He was determined to select work of quality that expressed a clear personal, social, or political statement. His visits generated debate within the prison art education community and students enjoyed the opportunity to discuss what they were doing with a renowned artist and seek his advice on how they might continue in art education when released.

With the selection completed, the team at Rua Red developed a distinctive education programme to promote engagement within the Tallaght community. In Limerick, the Hunt developed a programme with the involvement of two prisoner and prisoner-family support groups, Limerick City Build and Bedford Row Family Project. Maguire ensured that Eugene Langan, a professional photographer, would produce high quality photos of key pieces from each prison and during a day long shoot Eugene produced a remarkable

series of images. These would then be used by Rossi McAuley and Stephen Kerr at Distinctive Repetition to create a graphic identity for the project that would direct maximum attention on the prisoner artists' work. Many of those works were then framed by fellow prisoners in prison workshops, and as this catalogue goes to print Brian Maguire returns from exhibiting his own work in the United States and Mexico to oversee the design and installation of Open Minds at Rua Red.

As Open Minds gets underway, Prison Education Centres begin a new year and art and crafts rooms become busy again. Many will also attend classes from a range that includes social and health education, home economics, woodwork, music and computing, as well as art. The cross curricular work characteristic of prison education is exemplified in the 'Five for Fifty' animated film made by women and men on the Mountjoy Campus. An anthology of prison writing will be published in late 2019 and there is a demand for schemes to fund visits by theatre companies and musicians.

Open Minds fairly represents what is going on in prison art education, revealing a diverse range, that includes drawing, painting, digital art, ceramics, sculpture, spoken word, and music. The emerging Artists work with patience, energy, humour, determination, and imagination, expressing affection, pain, loss, regret, hope. Prison education is also dependant on high levels of co-operation between Students, Teachers, and Prison officers. In prison classrooms, where Students attend voluntarily, conflict is rare and concentration on the work at hand produces a focused atmosphere as well as constructive debate and discussion. There is an appetite for



Untitled, ceramic, Arbour Hill, Anon



Untitled, pyrography, Midlands Prison, Anon

the creative arts amongst those attending prison education centres and the schemes funded by the Arts Council and the Irish Prison Service that bring artists and writers into prisons have operated successfully for more than three decades.

The collaboration between Brian Maguire as curator and Rua Red and the Hunt as facilitators, reveals once again the importance of public-spirited engagement and civic support. The Open Minds exhibition will help prisoner artists to build a new life and to maintain personal and family relationships. Recently released prisoners whose work is shown will visit the exhibition; those not in a position to visit will see slideshows and videos documenting the project. The exhibition will be the final stage in a creative process whereby the artist will have learned through presenting the work and from the audience response.

Brian Maguire brought enthusiasm, judgement, and confidence to the challenge of selecting and curating. He opened doors connecting people and supported them as they worked together. His commitment to prison arts remains undiminished and he is generous with his advice and time. Eddie Cahill recently spoke about how when Brian came to teach in Portlaoise Prison he carried the key to his future in the form of art so that, in time, Eddie ‘painted his way out of prison’. The work of prison art education continues and, on the evidence of Open Minds, does so with purpose.

Tom Shortt
Arts Development Officer,
Irish Prison Education Service.

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Untitled, acrylic, Limerick, Anon



Untitled, ceramic sculpture, Midlands, Anon

Day 10

Midlands Prison

The prison is known as the Midlands Prison, built around twenty-five years ago right next to the old, cut-stone jail in Portlaoise. It has since had large blocks added inside the walls. In many ways this prison gives meaning to the old phrase, the Big House. It is a huge building which you never see in total from the outside but wander through continually inside.

We enter by a single small door, and after identification by the officers who confirm and admit at the control room, we go through the usual airport-like security and then into a small yard and pathway that leads to the prison block. Here we go through various corridors and up stairs and after some time we are at a double-door entrance to the school, an L shaped corridor with staff room, offices, and classrooms. As it is 9:30 am the staff room is full of teachers; classes were due to start shortly. Introductions are made to the four art teachers. Going first to the ceramics room we see work by a middle-aged traveller man that fits easily under the heading of Latin American Magic Realism. The pieces of sculpture have a narrative text that is a part of the work.
A second man's work – a series of dissected spheres standing on one another – impresses. Across the corridor in the art room we see a beautiful image of a burnt piece of timber that shows hands grasping a ball. At this point men who impress with their skill and output are being identified. We figure out where they are and officers search for them. By 12:30 pm we have seen everyone we need to see and collected another set of paintings of trees. Prisons, by their nature, have many things happening and contrary to common expectation are really busy places. Each day, activities dealing with release planning, health, education,

or security take place. Visits are daily events. When you make a once-off visit, such activities produce a potluck effect. Today, for example, many of the men are engaged in a seminar with an outside agency. We did however manage to meet most of the men whose work we sought for the exhibition. At 12:30 pm we headed for Tallaght to report on our journey.

Conclusion

This concludes our route. I saw work sent from Loughan House and Cloverhill Prisons though I did not visit either. Education is present in each prison in Ireland. The teachers are critical to the process and have a strong influence on the art direction of each prison. The craft varies from prison to prison. In one, pottery is brilliant, in another the use of felt, in another the sewing machine and, in another, drawing. This shows the influence and energy of the staff. The success of the thirty-four year old Arts Council program with the Irish Prisons Service of sending artists into prisons is demonstrated by outcomes directly traceable to those residencies. The nature of imprisonment with the attendant withdrawal from society and from the large vista and complexity of possibilities that we, as citizens of Europe enjoy, leaves a gap that can be partly filled by the imagination. In our language we talk of how songs and books and films give us temporary escape from our everyday and we realised how much more this experience is needed in jail. The condition of the studio (isolation) is the condition of the cell. Communication through art, a solitary action whereby the audience comes to the work later, is also possible in jail. Joseph Beuys commented on this similarity. Art that reinforces the inner world has a particular place in this world of stone and timelessness, where one day resembles another. It was a pleasure and privilege to visit these institutions over a two-week period and meet so many people whose work is now in these exhibitions in Dublin and Limerick.

“the conditions of the studio – isolation – are the conditions of the cell. Communication through art – a solitary action – is also possible in jail. Art which reinforces the inner world has a particular place in this world of stone and timelessness. It was a pleasure and privilege to visit these institutions, over a two week period and meet so many prisoners whose work is now shown in this exhibition.”

Brian Maguire, 2019