LOVELY WEATHER DONEGAL RESIDENCIES: ART AND CLIMATE CHANGE AS PUBLIC ART PROJECT

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Submitted: 29 January 2011

Abstract

The Lovely Weather Donegal Residencies is a joint project between the Donegal County Council/DCC, the Regional Cultural Centre Letterkenny/RCC and Leonardo/Olats. It is part of a larger Public Art programme of the DCC that focuses on meaningful collaborative projects with local communities.

The commissioning of public art in Ireland, utilising The Per Cent for Art Scheme, gives the public the opportunity to experience a vast range of contemporary art in their everyday life and provides the artist with the challenge and opportunity to create work for public engagement and response. Donegal County Council, in the northwest of Ireland, have been known for their varied and flexible approach to commissioning, which has been both temporary and permanent. Commissions have been drawn from a range of arts disciplines including visual arts, the performing arts, community arts and literature. New, original artwork, created specifically for the local context, has always been encouraged. Public art represents an extremely important part of the cultural service provision within Donegal County Council; the area of socially engaged public art, which features some of the most renowned and innovative practice internationally, is very often locally connected, inherently addressing and responding to the local context. It offers unique development opportunities for us in Donegal.

In 2006 the Donegal County Council Public Art Office presented Making Shapes, Public Art in Donegal 2006—2010, which as part of the strategic plan, sought to develop a program of public art residencies, utilising both socially engaged and artist-led models of good practice, which would take place in the context of the Council’s overall cultural provision. The aim of this strand was to enable artists and arts organisations to work collaboratively with communities to create innovative, ambitious public art projects. The aim was also to develop art projects that could become a meaningful part of everyday experience, and it was within this framework that we decided to develop and commission the Lovely Weather, Art and Climate Change artists’ residencies. This residency model is a model that Donegal County Council has used very successfully over the years. However, taking on an Art, Science and Climate Change theme was a new venture for us. However again, commissioning public art does not mean merely providing the public with the most obvious and fixed solution, for this would preclude the possibility of truly innovative art. It involves a process of dialogue and expanding horizons, in the sense that people cannot express a desire for that which they have not yet experienced. The fear of controversy, however, has too often been an inhibiting factor in the commissioning process. The pressure to play it safe, to do what has been done before or not to rock the boat can seem overwhelming and can impact negatively on the vision and ambition of a project. We believe that an effective public artwork does not patronise or placate its public, and the instantly popular option must be balanced against the desire to ‘raise the bar’ and the demands of enduring quality, creativity and professionalism.

We worked very hard in choosing the artists for Lovely Weather Art and Climate Change Residency Project, and the curators worked tirelessly in fine-tuning the projects collaboratively with the artists. The artists themselves embraced the idea and spirit of the project with a voracious energy, and the outcomes I think speak for themselves.

Climate Change is the issue of our times; the oceans are warming, the glaciers are disappearing and we all have a role to play. Scientists have a role, politicians have a role, and the Lovely Weather Art and Climate Change project has clearly demonstrated that artists certainly have a role. Was it Einstein who once said, “You cannot solve a problem with the same thinking that created it”? We say, who better to bring a clear and fresh voice to the Climate Change debate . . . than our artists.

For further information on the Lovely Weather Art and Climate Change Project Donegal, please see <www.donegalpublicart.ie>.