



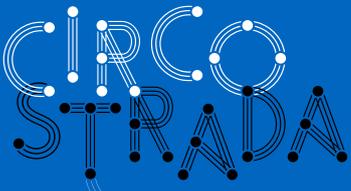
# FRESH STREET #3



ARTCENA is the National Centre for Circus, Street and Theatre Arts, created by the French Ministry of Culture. It coordinates Circostrada and has a permanent seat on its Steering Committee. It works closely with sector professionals and offers them publications and multimedia resources through its digital platform. It develops mentoring, training, tools and services to help them in their daily practices. It provides support to contemporary creation through national programmes and encourages international development of these three sectors.

**This publication was coordinated by Circostrada and edited by John Ellingsworth**

**Since 2003, Circostrada Network has been working to develop and structure the fields of circus and street arts in Europe and beyond. With more than 120 members from over 35 countries, it helps building a sustainable future for these sectors by empowering cultural players through activities in observation and research, professional exchanges, advocacy, capacity-building and information.**



European Network Circus and Street ArtS





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## Cranna Foirtil

Written by Máirtín Ó Direáin

**Luigh ar do chranna foirtil  
I gcoinne mallmhuir is díthrá,  
Coigil aithinne d'aislinge,  
Scaradh léi is éag duit.**

## Stout Oars

Translated by Tomás Mac Síomóin and Douglas Sealy

**Lean on your own stout oars  
Against leap-tide and ebb,  
Keep alight the coal of your vision;  
To part with that is death.**

We would like to thank Cló Iar-Chonnacht and Mary Sealy for their permission to reprint this excerpt.

## FOREWORD

“Where are you from?”

A seemingly simple question, which we tend to ask on a first encounter.

A question that forms the basis for our understanding of the geographic, politic, historic, economic, linguistic, emotive and expressive identities of the person standing in front of us. Yet, an answer that is likely to be read through biased lenses. A question that frames a pre-determined opinion towards those we are talking to. Yet, an answer that forces our interlocutors to account for themselves, placing them beyond the community.

A seemingly simple question, which implicitly is a statement.

All these thoughts formed the initial links between “Place and Identity”, the red thread of FRESH STREET#3, which was then carefully explored through discussions, immersive walks and artistic presentations. Facing, as we are, a world more polarised than ever before, with inequalities and racialized nationalisms on the rise across continents, it is hard not to wonder how can street arts play their historical pivotal role in delivering messages of hope and stimulating new human connections. For better or worse, identities may well be a central topic in tomorrow’s political life, and during these three days we resolved to debate on how identities can transform places, but also on how places can inform identities.

As the President of Ireland, Michael D. Higgins, stated in the opening words of FRESH STREET#3: *“In situating the arts as a glorious element in a living community, and by building a “meitheal” – the Irish word for mutual and reciprocal support – between artist and audience, we can contribute to a society in which every person can feel invited and empowered to take part”.*

The need to be. The need to know who we are. The need to be known. The need to be clear of our viewpoint and what shaped it. The need to know our origins and our roots. The need to understand our neighbours and their experience. The need to connect and form bonds across territories. The need to bridge and understand the past. The need for art to relate, express, translate, digress. The need for public expression and collective experience. The need for street arts to revolutionise, alter and transmute our notion of space and where we belong. The need for art to democratise.

**Lucy Medlycott**  
Director, ISACS

**Stéphane Segreto-Aguilar**  
Head of International Development at ARTCENA, Circostrada Network Coordinator

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

● <b>Jay Pather, Impressions from a Keynote</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>INIS OÍRR</b>	<b>9</b>
● <b>Interview: Kate Boschetti &amp; Liam Wilson – Artists in residence at Áras Éanna Arts Centre</b>	<b>10</b>
● <b>Interview: Deana Kolencíková</b>	<b>12</b>
● <b>'Spaces of Opportunity: Artistic Creation on the Periphery', by Gert Nulens</b>	<b>13</b>
WORKING THE LAND	16
● <b>Interview: Reinaldo Ribeiro, Colectivo Lamajara</b>	<b>16</b>
● <b>Interview: Kim Tilbrook, Life Cycles and Landscapes</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>IMAGINING FRESH STREET BY MARY PATERSON</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>GALWAY</b>	<b>24</b>
● <b>James Riordan, Gaillimh Abú</b>	<b>25</b>
ONLY CONNECT	28
● <b>Breakout Session I: Making Connections</b>	<b>28</b>
● <b>Interview: Nullo Facchini, Cantabile 2</b>	<b>30</b>
TRUST ME	31
● <b>Breakout Session II: Red Tape</b>	<b>31</b>
● <b>Interview: Sho Shibata, Stoppap Dance Company</b>	<b>33</b>
LEARNING ON AND OFF THE STREET	34
● <b>Breakout Session III: Education</b>	<b>34</b>
● <b>Interview: Jean-Sébastien Steil, FAI-AR</b>	<b>36</b>
THE CHANGING CITY	37
● <b>Breakout Session IV: Urban Environment</b>	<b>37</b>
● <b>Interview: Heba el-Cheikh, Mahatat for Contemporary Art</b>	<b>39</b>

## JAY PATHER, IMPRESSIONS FROM A KEYNOTE

25 years after apartheid, Cape Town remains a divided city. In these extracts from his keynote address Jay Pather, curator of the festival *Infecting the City*, asks what it might mean for South Africa to remake its place and identity.

The theme of place and identity is both compelling and vexing. As human beings we intrinsically believe in a good story – one that has a beginning, a middle and an end. When it comes to place and identity we expect progress and transformation, leading to common understanding and peace. We believe that, like any good story, our societies will simply get better. And so it is deeply confounding to the soul, and indeed shocking to the human spirit, when there are all the signs of a deepening crisis around rights and economic inequality, brought on by a voracious global economy that serves a minority, and in many instances a tiny minority.

In the midst of this there has been an attack on migration, which has been a feature of human lives since the beginning of time. In

Europe and the United States, but can be found in such places as Brazil, Israel and India. Now, nationalism is not such a bad thing when affirmation of heritage is needed, but our current crises have brought about a reactionary and forcefully entrenched nationalism, sparked by selfish interests and pedalled through ignorance and fear. When common consensus is so hard to achieve, the effect on all sentient beings is devastating; and so we have entered the age of the Anthropocene, when what we have done to the planet and our ecosystems is impossible to reverse. Coming from Southern Africa, where 400 people just died in massive flooding, the idea of identity becomes a luxury when place has been so brutalised. There are many contradictions within this debate. With modernity has come globa-

lisation, which has opened up migration. And yet migration has brought the closing and tightening of borders, and an upsurge in the kind of nationalism that makes a mockery of the very notion of diversity that was meant to be at the centre of globalisation. I believe it is these complexities, contradictions and hypocrisies that artists are best equipped to deal with, because performance is about mutability, embodiment, critique, and an intersectional vision that can cut across borders, race, gender, class and sexuality. Understanding the momentum of change, art has the tools to open up identity as malleable, flexible, complex – not limited to any one thing.

But I will leave the world of Europe and narrow down on South Africa, the country of my birth, where place and identity have been central to our national debates since 1994 when Nelson Mandela came to power. For colonised countries like mine, the notion of modernity was not something that arose from indigenous nations but was something imposed on us by the West – as was globalisation, first embarked on, not only through migration, but through the forceful takeover of land, of identity, of name, of culture, of our own nationalisms.

In 1994, South Africa gained an independence that was hard won. As Nelson Mandela became President, South Africa gave the world a gift in the form of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), a way to bring the oppressor and the oppressed together. It was tempting in its neatness and dramatic resonance: climatic, with quick character turnarounds, grand gestures of compassion, and needed endings. It was going to open a way to reclaim place and identity; to address, in short, apartheid. However, apartheid was complex; it was immense, unending, systemic, multimodal and pervasive. It lay not in what individual dicta-



© *Infecting the City*

a good story one expects fluidity of borders, greater sharing amongst different kinds of people... but this is under attack. The growing nationalism is not only present in

lisation, which has opened up migration. And yet migration has brought the closing and tightening of borders, and an upsurge in the kind of nationalism that makes a moc-

tors did, but in what ordinary people did to other ordinary people.

Most of all though, the TRC glossed over the fact that South Africa's wealth and land remained pretty much where they were under apartheid. Reparations were not spoken of, land and wealth were not redistributed. Equity among rich and poor, black and white, has still not been achieved, a quarter of a century after Nelson Mandela became President. Today the statistics speak for themselves: our unemployment rate is 30%, and 65% of black people live in poverty. From a global perspective, our country lies locked in the world economy. At the height of apartheid our currency was equal to the

fully infecting a city is a playful intervention on etymology and a conscious act to inform place and identity. Cape Town ranked the international winner of Trip Advisor's Travelers' Choice Awards, and is considered the best destination in Africa by the World Tourism Awards. It is also a city where apartheid was born, and the remnants of it have an enduring presence in a topography which, 25 years after apartheid was supposed to have ended, still separates the white suburbs and the black townships.

Many of the festival works speak directly to this. In 2014, Phumulani Ntuli (with Nkateko Baloyi and Pule Magopa) created *Umjondolo*, a piece that metaphorically brought

it into a space where you can eat, smell and taste. There was one piece where a scent artist, Tammy Frazer, infused the public fountains with smells of the forests. Another artist, Katie Urban, in a work titled *Processional Walkway*, created a rose petal carpet that emerged from Cape Town station, the place where most of the working class, living far away in the townships, come in for work each day. She created these red petal carpets that led from the station into the middle of the city.

There's also a lot of work around memory. It's not often talked about, but Cape Town is a place where slaves were bought and sold. Many of them came from Indonesia and Malaysia, but also from parts of Africa, and their bones are buried in various places. In 2012, Nicole Sarmiento, Memory Biwa, and Tazneem Wentzel did a lot of work trying to find where these bones were and as a result created *The Callings*, a series of on-site ritual performances spread around the city. In another on-site exhibition, artist Haroon Gunn-Salie created *Witness* in District Six, an area that was demolished during apartheid. The government had replaced the old buildings with new houses, but of course you can't just put in a new house; once you tear down a building you tear down a community. They'd built these new houses, painted white, and very few people wanted to move back. So, Gunn-Salie created a piece about these empty houses by placing single objects in empty white-walled rooms – a tin mug, a frozen porcelain cat, a prayer mat, an abandoned taffeta ballgown – reminding us of a community that we will never get back again.

Many artists are also working with remaking place on a more obviously positive note. Neo Muyanga did an operetta in Cape Town's Grote Kerk, a church that was one of the bastions of apartheid in South Africa, located across the road from where the slave quarters, the Slave Lodge, used to be. He worked with a choir from Khayelitsha township, and, using a poem by Antjie Krog that treated the theme of reconciliation, created some extremely moving and beautiful performances around the pain that is caused, the betrayal and the healing. People



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American dollar; when Nelson Mandela came to power our currency dropped to twelve rand to the dollar. Land was not redistributed, keeping our markets fragile but safe. Fearful of redistribution of land, fearful of what might happen to our economy, white South Africa owns exactly what they always did during apartheid.

Infecting the City, as a festival that takes root firmly in the centre of Cape Town's business district, tries to do something with this. 'Infection' is loaded with negative connotations. The body, like the city, is a sacrosanct yet contested space, sealed shut with skin yet porous and vulnerable. The act of wil-

the township to the suburb by recreating shack settlements in suburban Cape Town. In 2013, Tebogo Munyai went to Thibault Square in the Central Business District and put up shack-like structures with bullet holes in the walls. On the inside were performers, but you couldn't see them unless you looked through a bullet hole, and most of the time you could only see part of what was happening. You felt like a voyeur, and it was a very intelligent evocation of where we are now – looking in, but not joining in.

Another aim of the festival is to take the Business District, which is alienating for so many South Africans, and make it familiar – make

were crying because of what this church represented, and because of what the piece was trying to say from inside it.

This brings us to a final strand for the festival: resilience and dreaming; artists talking about place and identity as something achievable through adaptation and resilience. One example of this is the contemporary artist and academic Khanyisile Mbongwa, who has been developing work around *iRhanga* – the pathways that thread among homes in black townships.

Evoking the theorist Jordache A. Ellapen, who sees the township, prevented from being either fully modern or rural, as a hybrid space, Mbongwa constructs the alleyway as a liminal space within this liminal space – a space, as Mbongwa writes, within Frantz Fanon's concept of a 'world without spaciousness'. She continues: 'In many cases township spaces are represented as temporary and uninhabitable. But how does the existence of the alleyway enable much more complex dialogues about the paradoxes of black, lived experience? If townships are an apartheid project, where are the spaces of resilience that people have carved within them as these spaces continue to seem permanent in post-apartheid South Africa.' She argues that the alleyway is precisely such a space that enables black radical imagination.

Mbongwa also writes about a dance form called Pantsula that has developed in the townships and spread through South Africa: 'Pantsula centres heavily on footwork – complex, accelerated, or slow-motion – as it is the feet that allow you to run, to work, to walk to the train station. In Pantsula, one moment one is walking fast, the next one is running, jumping, then coming to a sudden halt. It's the silent revolution of those who dared themselves to go beyond an abject



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space that was designed to try and make them passive and docile.'

The range of works that Infecting the City programmes embodies this social velocity – the pace of change, the reality of collapse, and the rebuilding and remaking of place and identity in our societies. But the desire for stability in our spaces and solace in our homes continues to be a challenge.

One edition of Infecting the City closed with a work by Aeneas Wilder called *Under Construction*. It was built in District Six, the site of forced removals during apartheid, and consisted of the painstaking construction of a complex yet fragile wooden structure. The pieces were not bolted together but were self-supporting and precariously balanced. After days spent creating the work, on the final day Wilder ceremonially kicked it, destroying it in seconds.

Such works remind us that in South Africa the idea of making place – at least with the

materiality of something solid, long-standing, bolted-down and firm – still eludes us. But they remind us as well that something in the alchemy of live art, public and public spaces is still subject to feverish interrogation and infectious reimagining. What we experience in these works may be the turbulence of a deeply unsettled society, the aftershocks of the catastrophes that have come before, or predictions of what is to come, but for now these nudges and nods to how place may be remade are overwhelmingly performative and temporal and yet powerful and enduring. In their temporality, all these works can really do is ask us to confront the weighty and pressing need for something more integral to turn to in our global and local societies. A mirror and flame to ignite more significant transformations in power and to afford all of our citizens the luxury of a place that will not again shift, displace and expel; and identities that allow for multiplicity, choice, tolerance, self-determination, respect and dignity.



Jay Pather is an associate professor at the University of Cape Town, director of the Institute for Creative Arts (ICA), curator for Infecting the City and the ICA Live Art Festival, and artistic director of Siwela Sonke Dance. Recent addresses include for Festival of the Future City (UK), Independent Curators International (New York) and at the Haus der Kunst (Munich). Recent articles appear in *Changing Metropolis II*, *Rogue Urbanism*, *Performing Cities*, *Where Strangers Meet* and the book, *Transgressions, Live Art in South Africa*.

🌐 [www.ica.uct.ac.za](http://www.ica.uct.ac.za)

# INIS OÍRR

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To consider themes of place and culture, heritage and identity, the FRESH STREET delegation journeyed to Inis Oírr – the smallest of the three Aran Islands that stretch across Galway bay, settled since 1500BC, and a place well used to visitors.

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Asked about the island's history, Mícheál O'hAllúin, local raconteur and intermittent FRESH STREET island guide, spins a good tale: in the 6<sup>th</sup> century a warrior-king-turned-monk named Enda arrives on the Aran Islands to establish a monastic settlement. It grows, spreads out, others follow, and the whole country (untouched by Roman occupation as Ireland, 'Hibernia', was considered too cold) becomes a flourishing centre of scholarship. And just as well: the Roman Empire unravels, and Europe falls to its dark age. With the light of learning extinguished it's up to the children of Enda – the people of Ireland – to go forth and reignite civilisation on the continent. ('Ha!' O'hAllúin laughs. 'You didn't expect to be hearing *that* now did you?')

Today, Inis Oírr has a population of around 280 – and holding steady. Emerging from

decades of slow decline, the island has 'found its confidence' again by reorienting its economy towards a bustling tourist trade. The season runs March to October, and up to 3000 visit each day, but of course island life continues year-round.

Stepping into this miniature world, the FRESH STREET delegation saw work produced by visiting artists Kate Boschetti and Liam Wilson, residents at Inis Oírr's own Áras Éanna Arts Centre, and Deana Kolenčíková, whose one-day micro-residency led to an installation at O'Brien's Castle – a stone hill-fort with panoramic views over the island. The day was rounded out with a performance on the quayside by Turas Theatre Collective.

For most of the FRESH STREET crowd it was an exceptional experience of the wild

and remote. But while Inis Oírr might feel like a frontier – on the fringe of Europe and the edge of the Atlantic Ocean – that's more of an outsider's view.

'We are the centre of our universe,' says O'hAllúin, turning towards the mainland. 'And the rest – that's just another island over there.'



## INTERVIEW: KATE BOSCHETTI & LIAM WILSON - ARTISTS IN RESIDENCE AT ÁRAS ÉANNA ARTS CENTRE



Kate Boschetti and Liam Wilson have lived and immersed themselves entirely on the island in May 2019, creating a site-responsive, fresh piece of work for and with the island. They were joined for their residency by filmmaker Andrea Galad, who worked on a documentary to be released later this year.

### How did you feel coming to the island as outsiders?

Before we arrived, our thoughts and feelings were mixed – we were happy and excited to receive this gift, and it was clearly a great privilege, but we admit there was also a degree of apprehension connected with the unknown elements. Of course, there was the risk that we would feel unable to live up to the challenge that we had accepted.

As soon as we arrived we realised just how welcoming and beautiful the island is, and our concerns quickly dissolved – to be replaced by new ones! Yes, we soon felt the

The local residents are amazing and we felt a great warmth and acceptance of our presence, and an enthusiasm and curiosity concerning our work. It's also clear that there's a great diversity of characters on the island, so we'd say we could have easily spent years here before getting to know the people deeply. The pub is one of the main places to socialise, and we had many great discussions in the small hours of the morning.

### How did you come to work with Inis Oírr's stone walls?

When you go to the Aran Islands, you notice the dry stone walls immediately. They are

As jugglers we typically seek the props which best fit the style of movement we are interested in. There's an overwhelming choice of clubs, balls, rings, hats, etc. available to buy, mostly made of light and bouncy plastics. The fact that stones are heavy and hard and often difficult to handle was a point of great interest for us, as we saw a chance to turn this norm upside down – to let the 'prop' influence our style of movement and play a more active role in the conversation.

### You were on the island for a month. How did your sense of it change over time?

The feeling of arriving and exploring the island was elating and energising. In the following weeks, as we grew familiar with the place, there was a shift towards an appreciation of the tranquil beauty of Inis Oírr. This peace had a deep effect on our attitude to the work we were doing; it is something we really value and perhaps one of the most special gifts we have received.

As the showing approached there was a second wave of excitement which was, in some ways, difficult to reconcile with the quiet we were feeling inside. This peaked as the group arrived from Galway and we made the final preparations for the showing. It is a great challenge to describe the emotions that this moment brought up in us. We became aware that there was a contradiction in the desire to have a collective experience representing the outcomes of our presence on Inis Oírr – as so much of what we had received was connected with



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value of being in a new context, and working in a place with possibilities of a kind that just don't exist in Berlin or Milan. It was exactly because of our inability to imagine working here that we had so much to gain and no excuse to do anything but face it.

striking and beautiful and if you take an interest in them you will be rewarded as you realise that each wall is unique in character and they all tell personal and local stories. In this context it is hard not to think about working with stone.



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the serenity of the place, an isolated beauty which is fragile, sensitive, personal, not at all easy to package and present through the medium of live performance.

**In that case, do you see the residency, and its showing, as a one-off?**

Yes, the residency has been a one-off in many ways, as so much of the work was tied to the place and it's hard to imagine

translating that to other contexts. At the same time, the way of working and the attitude to research and creation we found on Inis Oírr will definitely influence us as we go forward. We feel we've better understood how important it is to be empty and receptive, to be brave and admit that we don't know much about the world we live in, or what our best role as actors in it might turn out to be. We've realised that we can only learn to build a stable founda-

tion for our work if we accept that we don't know beforehand what it will look like, and that we will get much stronger through our process if it includes an acceptance of our weaknesses.



## INTERVIEW: DEANA KOLENČÍKOVÁ



Deana Kolenčíková was born and grew up in Bratislava (Slovakia). She took part in the European project *The Spur* (2016-2018), along with five other selected visual artists to carry out research work in residency with particular emphasis on working and creative processes. She was resident on Inis Oírr as part of the FRESH STREET programme. There, she questioned the knowledge, perception and imagination of the inhabitants through the interrogation of memory and mapping. [www.deanakolencikova.com](http://www.deanakolencikova.com)

### How did you get into working in public space?

I actually started out in photography, working in a kind of free documentary style. Every week I would go out onto the streets of my hometown, Bratislava, and explore new areas of public space – places I'd never been before. I was always interested in finding a different or surprising perspective on the city, so before I went onto the street I'd choose a topic. Normally a photographer works the other way around – finds their images and then tries to arrange them in a theme – but I liked to hunt for the people and scenes that matched my topic. And I always found some. I stopped using photography as my main tool of expression and work more now with intermedia approaches, but there's still a connection. Photography is always open to interpretation, and I find the same thing with art in public space. I like to comment on things – to observe and to comment – but I don't necessarily need to find solutions.

**Quite a lot of your work has involved commenting on systems or rules – whether that's simulating obscure paperwork in a piece like *The counter*, or, during a residency in Albi, trying to mail a crêpe in a French post office...**

Yes, and with the crêpe it really got a reaction: they called the supervisor and then the boss of the post office. Afterwards I documented this in an exhibition and a woman who came was inspired enough to send me her own crêpe. Hers was wrapped in cling film though, which made it acceptable, and so when it arrived it was with a very formal letter from the post office apologising for damage to the pancake.



© *New Territories* by Deana Kolenčíková

**On an island like Inis Oírr perhaps there are fewer human systems and nature is more present. What's struck you in your time here?**

I come from a landlocked country, so I had a lot of small, and I suppose naive questions: how do you get cars to the island? Is there a hospital? Things like that.

But the island itself is such an interesting space. From the highest point, you can look at it as if it were a map – you can see the outline of the whole island, really define the whole space. With the stone walls as well, you see the shape of it.

**Residencies like yours on Inis Oírr are usually quite short, and the work that's made can be quite ephemeral. What do you think they leave behind?**

I don't think it has a huge impact on anyone, or on any space. For me what's valuable is if it can, in a more subtle way, trigger something for someone – some memories, ideas, a moment of inspiration. That's a victory for me because then the work can develop into something else, something unexpected. I also think that memory can work surprisingly well, and that if something is good it will stick in a person's mind, or in their cells perhaps, and can come back years later.

# 'SPACES OF OPPORTUNITY: ARTISTIC CREATION ON THE PERIPHERY', BY GERT NULENS

Residencies have become a staple of artistic creation and happen just about everywhere – from city centres to distant countryside. Surveying the field, Gert Nulens finds opportunity on the periphery.

Kate Boschetti and Liam Wilson's work-in-progress performance on Inis Óírr was a clear example of how an artwork can be inspired by its place of creation. Stones from the island became circus objects that transformed into walls – walls between the two jugglers, between the artists and their audience, and between audience and landscape. Beyond these stone borders, the open air and wild ocean.

The performance of Kate and Liam, the visit to the Áras Éanna Arts Centre, and the walk on this remote Irish island, all raised a host of questions about place and identity. How does this rural and remote context shape an artistic creation? Can a place be more than a kind of background or scenery? Does a rural environment differ from urban creation processes, and in what sense? What makes a place rural or urban? What about in-between places, or non-places?



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Lots of these questions are real brain-teasers and this article is not pretending to have all the answers. But the questions are certainly worth thinking about. Let us take

a journey then from remote islands to city centres, from the rural to the urban, from cultural participation to cultural exclusion, from city outskirts to rural spaces.

## The rural, the urban, and the periphery

The opposing archetypes of rural and urban have been used in a range of sectors to justify one-dimensional divisions in society. Going back to sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies' famous distinction between *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, these archetypes still have an enormous impact on planning and policy in the fields of economics, mobility, education, the arts, and environmental management. A recent example of the contrast between these opposites is the renewed effort, following arguments concerning pollution and climate change, to centralise people in dense city centres and convince rural inhabitants to

give up their romantic dream of a detached house with large garden and double garage. In Flanders, the government recently went so far as to introduce the 'mobiscore', a means to measure a property's impact on the environment by its location. Not surprisingly, accommodation in cities has a much better mobiscore than houses in rural areas. The introduction of the mobiscore was the starting point of a controversial discussion between both sides of the urban-rural separation. This ongoing discussion often implies an unspoken hierarchy between the dominant city discourse and the subordinated rural areas.

The terms rural and urban can be useful, but in a European context it no longer makes much sense to retain this kind of oppositional thinking. It is much more interesting and relevant to focus on the interwovenness of the two opposites. Rural and urban have become dynamic scales instead of static antonyms. Cities can have a very urbanised economy and yet their communities may have rural characteristics (giving us the idea of a city as a 'collection of villages'). In some urban districts population density is declining or becoming more homogeneous (in terms of background, education, etc.) – a typically 'rural' characteristic. In some vil-

lages, meanwhile, one can see a spectacular concentration of artistic activity or technological development. Indeed, it seems more relevant to interpret reality in terms of urban rurality or rural urbanity.

For the arts, cities have always been places that attract activity. Cities combine the availability of professional education, artistic community, cultural infrastructure, financial oppor-

tunities, and a large potential audience. What's more, cities are melting pots of cultures, organisations and activities. Cities can create both monstrous realities and unthinkable dreams. Challenges and opportunities go hand in hand. Not surprisingly, cities have always been magnets for creative people.

On the other hand, one can notice a kind of conformist reality in urban artistic processes.

Communities reproduce dominant artistic practices, and the same group of cultural participants is being addressed time after time. In search of artistic innovation we often must look to the periphery – whether that be the edge of a city; in-between spaces like shopping malls or highways (what the French anthropologist Marc Augé calls 'non-places'); or the edges of culture, gender and behaviour.

## Innovation from the margins

In the theatre and dance fields, creation tends to be centred in big cities. In circus and street arts, however, one can see the picture is more mixed, with creation centres like La Cascade in Bourg-Saint-Andéol (a French village with a population of around 7500), Latitude 50 in Belgium's remote village of Marchin (fewer than 5000 inhabitants), or Dommelhof in Pelt (a non-urban community in Flanders with 33,000 inhabitants).

There are many reasons for this distribution, including the lower level of infrastructure and professionalisation in the field, but we can also see that street arts and circus are fundamentally looking for venues outside of national theatres, opera houses and other cultural temples. Their stage is outside such walls, and indeed there's a certain school of street arts driven by the desire to reach new audiences and increase cultural participation

– to 'bring culture to the people'. Following this mission, many residency spaces in areas with little access to culture have created special audience and outreach programmes.

For the artists themselves, one of the benefits of creating on the periphery is the availability and affordability of creation space, but residencies in peripheral spaces can also provide mental space. Artists are pulled away from the urban rat race. Indeed, the arts field can be very competitive, if not brutal. In the periphery there is physical and mental space to focus and interiorise. This can be very helpful at a certain stage of a creation process. One can imagine that in the stage of brainstorming and inspiration, nothing beats the lively environment of a city. However, in the stage of transforming ideas into images and movements, in the stage of composition and dramaturgy, remote residencies can be very

useful as artistic boltholes. Artists often praise the efficient progress they made in this kind of remote residency. Everything is focused on the artistic work. No time for diversion.

Because of their remoteness these residencies can also be 'safe spaces'. Artists are welcomed in a warm and forgiving environment. Space for failure is created. A critical eye is always there, but residents are shielded from the instantaneous, direct critique typical in a crowded and competitive urban arts network.

Sometimes these residency spaces, as in the case of Kate and Liam on Inis Oírr, also act as a source of inspiration. Creations can be made for a specific location, as has been the case for the latest editions of the Belgian circus festival Theater op de Markt in Dommelhof. With each edition a new artistic director is invited to create a circus show in the woods surrounding Dommelhof with students from the Dutch circus school ACaPA. A couple of weeks before the festival, the director and the students plan and create a show on the spot, making use of the trees, hills and character of the landscape. This interwovenness between space, artists – and, come the performance, audiences – has proven to be magic.

So residencies in peripheric locations can be inspirational and safe contexts that provide physical and mental space. But creation in these locations should not be romanticised. Indeed, these spaces also come with challenges. Paradoxes in remote residency spaces include isolation versus engagement, financial needs versus artistic commitment, and production versus presentation.



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## A balance of interests

Every artistic creation is inherently a fragile process which cannot, at a certain phase, endure external pressures. Indeed, a creation process not only demands inspiration and ideas, it also requires a form of isolation and loneliness. Separated from the usual urban artistic network, creation in remote spaces can be very lonely. For some artists this isolation comes with a certain weight and pressure: the loneliness can be overwhelming. For others it has proven to be just the right context for their artistic work to flourish. This isolation can become problematic for the residency space itself on the level of strategy and communications: while isolation can work very well for the individual creation process of an artist, it can also lead to a lack of local support and engagement. If artists work in complete isolation, remote residency spaces risk becoming like isolated greenhouses for artistic products presented elsewhere. Artistic creation, in both urban and rural contexts, can be very antisocial.

And yet these peripheral areas can really benefit from audience interaction. Not only because of lower cultural participation levels, but also because local support is needed to maintain these spaces and to legitimise their public funding. The challenge, then, is for residency spaces in these locations to develop audience engagement programmes which gently introduce audiences within the fragile creation processes of artists. In the worst scenario this paradox of isolation versus engagement can degenerate into work disconnected from the world. In the best scenario it results in locally supported artistic innovation.

The second paradox pits the need for financial resources against artistic commitment.

We live in a reality in which circus and street arts companies are forced to find a lot of co-producers to finance a new production – and residencies come along with this, as every co-producer wants to bind a new creation to their organisation. In this system is there a risk that a residency in a remote space is taken not for its resonance with an artistic process but purely as a financial and pragmatic choice?

This is a relevant question, but points towards a necessary trade-off. The advantage of the current system of multiple residencies is that it creates a very broad network for new creations. The combined backing of all these spaces guarantees that the work will be supported, promoted and presented. It more or less prevents the creation of artistic work in which no one is interested. Another advantage is that residency spaces like to build up long-term relations with certain artists. It is much more interesting to start on an artistic path that will last several years than it is to support a lot of short-term projects.

In the worst scenario, the tension between financial needs and artistic commitment results in a random selection of artists seeking resources. In the best scenario it leads to long-term relationships with carefully selected artists whose work is profoundly supported.

The final paradox then is between production and presentation. A lot of the more important residency spaces in street arts and circus have a role in both creation and presentation.

In other industries this merging of production and presentation (or consumption) is actual-

ly rather rare. Rural areas especially act as producers of goods which are consumed by inhabitants of urban areas. Think of the production of water, food, nature, recreation activities, and so on. Rural areas are often product and service deliverers for urban areas.

In the arts field, parallels can be drawn to this classic pattern. The main stages for the consumption of art are situated in cities. Artists might paint or make sculptures in remote areas, but their work will be sold in urban galleries. In the field of circus and street arts, however, spaces follow a dual function, helping emerging talents to make their first creations while also being nodes in an international network of presentation. This mechanism brings a certain centralisation of power – with a handful of large actors deciding what is worth producing and what is worth presenting – but serves to continually introduce new artists into the field.

Paradoxes such as these are useful models for thinking about the decision-making that underlies creative processes, but, as with our urban-rural distinction, we needn't make a choice for one side or the other. We might talk forever about whether a creation is taking place in an urban context or a rural one, or about the relative merits of focused introversion versus extroverted engagement, but it is in the constant swinging between such positions, and in the acceptance of their conflicts, that creativity can flourish.



Gert Nulens is the director of Provinciaal Domein Dommelhof. Dommelhof has five creation spaces and hosts around 400 resident artists each year.

 [www.dommelhof.be](http://www.dommelhof.be)

## WORKING THE LAND

Putting a spotlight on two projects working with country landscapes, we interview Spain's Reinaldo Ribeiro and producer Kim Tilbrook from the UK.



### INTERVIEW: REINALDO RIBEIRO, COLECTIVO LAMAJARA



Reinaldo Ribeiro was born in Brazil and is one of the three core members of Colectivo Lamajara, an organization of artists who share a concern about body language and its possibilities of expression. It is formed by emerging artists, dancers and collaborators from other artistic disciplines.

🌐 [www.colectivolamajara.com](http://www.colectivolamajara.com)

**Your performance *Labranza* is inspired by the way farmers move and work. How did you develop the project?**

In 2016 the core members of the collective – myself, Paloma Hurtado, and Daniel Rosado – had a first residency at Centro Coreografico La Gomera in the Canary Islands. Our idea was to start a process through an experience of farming rather than from what we thought we knew about agriculture from books and films. So we found a farmer on this little island and we worked with him over fifteen days – in the mornings we were in the field, digging, ploughing, carrying equipment and animals, and then during the afternoons we'd put our physical experiences into dance and movement. That was the start of *Labranza*.

And it was very interesting because it showed how similar the lives of the dancer and the farmer can be. The big thing is the routine, the physical routine – you do the same thing for years and it transforms the body. The other point in common is the perception of time and space. Of course these are very important concepts in contemporary dance, you work a lot with these ideas. For the farmer also there are cycles of nature, seasonality, weather that impose a certain rhythm and modulate the work. We investigated these commonalities to look at the relationship between man and field, body and dancer...

There were three of us in the creation process, and each was drawn to a different aspect. Daniel, he was very interested in games and in the social life between the farmers, the stories they would tell us. Paloma was very interested in the hard work – the planting, the carrying, the physical labour. In the end I think the performance has a little of each of these interests and they form its different layers. One thing we decided though was that we would keep the movement simple; so it's not a free interpretation of movements you find in farming, it's more like enacting them to bring the truth of this movement to the public and to bring the landscape of the countryside to the geography of the body.

**When you performed in Fira Tàrraga the festival bussed audiences out of the city to a nearby farm. How has it been finding places to perform the work?**

Mostly we've performed in dance festivals and sometimes in city festas. I think at the start we thought we'd perform the project more than we have, but the response from festivals here in Spain is often that they love the project but don't have the space for it. Tàrraga is really a special case. When we talk to others it's hard to make them understand that *Labranza* could be in a city's park, or in front of a village church... There are many possibilities, but it takes a little imagination on the part of the presenter. We also had some push back from the contemporary dance world. At least in the

beginning we had some criticism that what we were doing in the performance was too literal – that the movement, and the costumes, were too literal. But this was the idea for us – to be onstage as three people working, not dancing – and in the end I think people saw that there was a genuineness to it.

**If those are the challenges, what have been the benefits of working in a rural setting?**

When a creation process puts us in contact with open spaces, with nature, we can forget everything. In the city, in a way, there is a lot of weight from what you see and hear; it's hard to be focused on your work and you can begin to doubt it. There's a lot of feedback that comes too early in the process, and suddenly you find you're creating not from the desire to say something but because you want to be part of an inner circle that judges your work to be contemporary. Being in relative isolation gives you the possibility to be very honest.

Now it's the way we want to work. Our next project, *Vulkano*, will follow a similar process – but this time, we're going deeper into the earth...



## INTERVIEW: KIM TILBROOK, LIFE CYCLES AND LANDSCAPES



Kim Tilbrook was the project manager for Life Cycles and Landscapes, and is a director of Red Herring Productions. Activate are producing a publication about the project, *Wayfaring – Reflecting on Life Cycles & Landscapes*, which will be available online at <https://activateperformingarts.org.uk>

### How did the Life Cycles and Landscapes project come about?

It started as a partnership between Activate Performing Arts in Dorset and the company And Now (artists Mandy Dike and Ben Rigby), who were commissioned to make a new piece of landscape art called *Wayfaring*. The initial idea was to create something around the Icknield Way – an ancient route, or collection of different paths, that runs along the ‘chalk spine’ from Norfolk to Dorset and dates back to the time before Britain was an island. They’ve found artefacts all along the Way from the people who used to walk the route, and so one of the themes of the project was migration and the movement of people. Another aim of Life Cycles and Landscapes was to develop the partnership with the National Association of AONBs (Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty’ which safeguard significant parts of the UK countryside). We wanted to find a model for working together which could deliver on our artistic aims but also address the core aims of bodies that guard and manage natural landscapes. For them it’s all about getting different kinds of people into the landscape, having them see it in new ways, giving them a sense of ownership...

At each of the project’s four locations there was a local arts festival or organisation as a partner alongside an AONB partner and any other bodies with responsibility for the landscape. Usually those responsibilities would overlap in various ways, with private estates and government trusts. Our partnership meetings would have up to 24 people in them.

### People might think that working in rural areas is a way to escape having to chase permissions...

Absolutely not! It took two years to put everything in place. There were times when we thought to ourselves, ‘There *must* be a quicker way’, but actually you need that amount of relationship building and working through red tape – especially when you’re working with non-arts organisations.

Nonetheless, this kind of landscape work is something that’s been growing. One of the aims of Life Cycles and Landscapes was to ensure that all the AONBs we worked with put an arts provision into their next five-year strategic plan – and they’ve done that to varying extents.

### Landscape art has a lot to draw on in terms of a site’s heritage, but does this richness create any problems in the creative process?

The sites do have their own weight of history, and in a way it’s difficult to deviate from it. The site can be so strong that as soon as you put a performance in it you get a feeling of an ancient ritual. So you go into a landscape and start to create something and it immediately takes on a life of its own.

The other side of heritage sites is that it’s complicated to work there because you’re dealing with multiple layers of protection. Maiden Castle, one of the sites where we performed *Wayfaring*, is a hillfort. For thousands of years people have gathered, celebrated, and built fires there. Then it was designated as a scheduled monument, which means you can’t dig into the ground and you can’t light a fire or have large pyros

on the site because the ash would mess up the carbon dating. So the site becomes frozen in time, and no new layers are added to a place where human beings have gathered for centuries.

It’s an interesting conversation – how to balance protection with active use and contemporary meaning – and it’s one that’s becoming really present in the heritage world.

### What advice would you have for artists wanting to work in this field?

Start very small. You don’t want to do a £50,000 project straight away. Instead look for a small project with a landscape partner that can build up your understanding of how the sector operates – and, of course, of how to work in landscapes and get audiences there.

The collaborations can be challenging, but both sides will find there are new audiences up for grabs. We got walkers and people who go into the countryside who wouldn’t usually be interested in art. Our partners got arts audiences who might not spend a lot of time in the countryside.

Then, finally, find somewhere that inspires you. It’s not just a question of having a performance or artwork that you want to put somewhere; it’s about going to a place, being inspired by its uniqueness and then responding accordingly.

# IMAGINING FRESH STREET BY MARY PATERSON

Rousseau wrote that it is the imagination that enlarges the space of what is possible (for better or for worse) and nourishes our desires by giving us ‘the hope of satisfying them’. Tasked with following the three days of the FRESH STREET seminar to think about the possibilities – and the uncomfortable truths – of public space, writer and curator Mary Paterson invites us turn our gaze to the horizon.

Imagine: the mouth of the River Corrib, where Europe’s fastest flowing river rushes into the Atlantic Ocean. Here, on the west coast of Ireland, students, families and dog walkers stroll briskly towards the sound of the sea. The wind is so strong it whips the words from your tongue; you can’t be sure if you’ve spoken, or if you’re listening to the singing of the sky.

This is the Claddagh Basin, Galway. It’s a site of communal happiness and communal sadness, says Ulla Hokkanen, the director of Galway Community Circus (GCC), as we walk alongside the hiss of the river. These grassy banks are where the people of Galway come to celebrate, and to remember; these turbulent waters reflect the lives of the city, and sometimes take them too. In 2014, Galway’s Mayor called for nets to be installed beneath the river’s bridges in order to deter suicides. But on the days we visit, the place is filled with students drinking to mark the end of term, gazing towards the impossible horizon.

This nexus of meanings is why Hokkanen has chosen the Claddagh Basin as the site for *Wires Crossed*, a 72-hour spectacle of community river crossings conceived by GCC and the Ecole de Cirque du Bruxelles, which will take place in 2020. For three continuous days, residents of Galway will walk across the rapids on a tightwire: a real and symbolic journey which hopes to both represent and repair the mental health crisis affecting the town. Each crossing is a personal achievement as well as part of a large-scale event that stretches beyond any individual’s capacity. This is, then, a literal bridge over troubled waters: a community gathering that makes public the private struggles of all involved, and cheers everyone on to succeed.



© Declan Colohan, *Wires Crossed*

*Wires Crossed* is also one of the flagship events of Galway 2020: a year of events to celebrate Galway’s tenure as European Capital of Culture. Accessible, engaging and wordlessly profound, this project epitomises many of the aims of the wider programme as expressed by the 2020 organisers: ‘creating new ways of thinking, new ways of working’. Building on the myriad meanings of Galway’s landscape, it is also rooted in the life and soul of the city – ‘authentically of Galway’. As Helen Marriage, artistic director of Galway 2020, says, there is already an abundance of street arts in this city; the 2020 programme is simply an invitation to make these artists and organisations known to ever bigger audiences.

This is the context and the setting for FRESH STREET#3, in which people from around the world meet to talk about the life and work of street arts. We are gathered to imagine the future, as well as to reflect on the past; to think about how to survive, as well as how to dream. We meet not only in Galway, where we are treated to a preview of *Wires Crossed*

(amongst many other things); but also take a day-long trip to the island of Inis Oírr.

Conceived for the opportunity of Galway 2020, *Wires Crossed* is also subject to the pressures placed on street arts in an international context. The expectation for Capital of Culture status is that it inspires culture-led economic regeneration. ‘Citizens can take part in the year-long activities and play a larger role in their region’s development and cultural expression’ says the European Commission, which has been running the European Capital of Culture project as a European Union initiative since 1985. ‘Being a European Capital of Culture brings fresh life to these regions, boosting their cultural, economic and social development.’ A Capital of Culture’s events are meant to appeal to everyone who lives here already, and also to enact a radical transformation from the status quo.

Who, then, is this art for? Who decides what it is meant to achieve? And how do artists, producers and audiences interact with these pressures on their own terms?

**Imagine: a conversation with someone who is no longer here. A message from someone you love. The unsaid and the unsayable, unfolding into your lap, perhaps, brushing insistently against your skin.**

In a conference session on the creative process, Didacienne Nibagwire from the Ishyo Arts Centre in Rwanda invites us all to write a letter to someone who is not here. This, she says, is where her creative process comes from: imagined conversations with absent friends. She describes the way this practice began – when, as a child, she missed her family, who had been killed in the genocide in Rwanda. Sitting in a lecture theatre in Galway, it is hard to imagine that type of absence, or that type of pain. I write a letter to a relative who has dementia, and then I stop, because it is making me cry.

Nobody does anything in the street in Rwanda, Nibagwire tells us: people don't eat in the street, don't kiss in the street. Terrible things have happened in these public spaces. Memories hang like fog, dampening people's movements. The performances that Ishyo Arts Centre stages on the streets of Kigali, then, are not just a matter of making things happen in public space but also of making public space happen. They are an attempt to start real conversations about things no one should have to imagine. In this way, they perform a similar double function to *Wires Crossed*: part representation, part act of repair. And, just like *Wires Crossed*, they are works of art that speak of and with an audience integral to their location.

Nibagwire's presentation is an important reminder, too, that street arts are not always vehicles for positive emotions. We might frequently use the language of 'fun' and 'tourism' to communicate about street arts to funders, policymakers and commercial interests. But

the connection between art and public space is relevant to every aspect of civic life.

During the same conference session, Mike Leahy from Spraoi International Street Arts Festival in Waterford City, Ireland, says he started making street arts because he was bored. In relation to the context Nibagwire has just described, his admission raises a laugh – but it's just as serious, and just as profound. The boredom of young people signifies a failure of the social contract; as Leahy describes it: nothing happened in his town, and he had no hopes for the future.

When Jean-Jacques Rousseau first described 'the social contract', in the eighteenth century, he was arguing against enslavement, aristocracy and the unequal application of the law. His utopian ideal was a society in which everyone shares equal rights and responsibilities, agreed by consensus and governed by direct democratic principle. Rousseau was writing 30 years before the French Revolution, when people still believed in the Divine Right of Kings; a century before Europeans called a halt to their slave trade; and longer still until the right to vote would be extended to a universal franchise. His ideas seem extraordinarily prescient, now. But they also prove that it is possible to think differently, that radical ideas will reach further than you can imagine.

When Leahy began turning his boredom into art, however, he was not enacting an ideal version of society – he was simply expressing himself. For years, Leahy says, the art he made wasn't even very good – he was learning on the job, with no person, no perfect form, to teach him. Similarly, Nibagwire's letters to her family were born from her private grief. In very different ways, they are both describing an intimate transformation of personal experiences into social



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impact. Social impact is often lionised – or instrumentalised – as the outcome of public art, but it always starts with a meaningful engagement on a private level. Just as a social contract must be based on the consent of everyone involved, so the collective impact of a work of art derives from its effective impact on the individual.

Indeed, Rousseau's near-contemporary, the philosopher Immanuel Kant, argued that the primary purpose of art is to prove that other people are real. We all travel through life, Kant said, assuming that the people we rub shoulders with in the street share a consciousness similar to our own. It is only when we are in the presence of great works of art that we know they do. To meet a work of art, said Kant, is also to meet the intention of the artist(s). Or, more specifically, to meet the artist in the intersubjective (that is, in the zone where two private people meet) discovery of their intention: to speak to the past together, to soothe a wound together, to find an echo for the nameless things you feel.

**Imagine: a dry stone wall perched on a cliff's edge, the salty spit of the sea rising from the rocks below. Two figures explore the wall in silence: moving in front and behind, balancing weather-worn stones on its shallow shelves, shaping their own bodies into the sharp edges of the rock.**

We are on the island of Inis Oírr, a two-hour boat trip into the Atlantic, watching a work in progress by jugglers Kate Boschetti and Liam Wilson. This is an island marked by movement, and walls. The movement of people from these islands across the wild sea to North America is the stuff of story and song, but there is a more profound movement stitched into the landscape of Inis Oírr, too. The ground has a limestone base, which makes it impossible to farm, so each field on the island is man-made. Hundreds of closely packed, dry stone walls cover Inis Oírr like tightly written spells. The first farmers moved sand and seaweed into these tidy pockets, and today this palimpsest sustains the island's current wave of movement – tourism.

Boschetti and Wilson have built a new wall on a bare piece of land overlooking the ocean. Alone, against the green-grey sea, the wall represents place and displacement at the same time. Its materials and shapes are unique to Inis Oírr; but the wall has been built out of context – displaced from a tool of survival into an aesthetic idea.

Unlike Hokkanen, Nibagwire or Leahy, Boschetti and Wilson have not spent years living in the site of their latest work. They are visitors to this place: artists in residence at Áras Éanna ('the most westerly arts centre in Europe,' says its director, Dara McGee), who have been exploring the remote island for a month. If *Wires Crossed* is imbued with symbol and metaphor, then, Boschetti and Wilson's work is more concerned with vision and form. And yet in this way it, too, is rooted in the earth. Asked if they could see this work being performed elsewhere, they both laugh: not unless they could take the rocks with them!

At one point the artists disappear behind the wall, and a tiny bird flies straight into the sky, as if on cue. The crowd laughs. In the Q&A that follows, we describe this extraordinary

coincidence to the artists, but they didn't see it – they were facing the other direction. Part of the gift of this performance, then, is an attention of looking – an attention that exceeds the intention of the artists, even while it reads their intentions in unintended ways.

Relocating Kant's intersubjective encounter into the sensations of a body, the contemporary philosopher Brian Massumi describes the experience of art as a type of atten-



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tion. Art happens, he says, when you sense meaning but you have not yet decided what anything means. Massumi describes the 'aesthetic realm' as a moment of potential, in which more than one thing can be true at the same time. The bird in Boschetti and Wilson's performance is a function for the work of art, as well as (unintentionally) a function of it. The bird's flight connects the artwork to the natural laws of the land, and the artwork transforms the natural movement into something else: a strange cameo, perhaps. The bird, in other words, means something and nothing at the same time.

This moment inspires a gentle piece of performance on the part of the audience, too: laughing at the surprise, we perform ourselves as a united crowd, all sharing the same thought about the impossibility of the bird.

If art works through modes of attention, then this type of physical performance could be described as art with a universal appeal. Juggling is an international form that trans-

cends most language and cultural barriers – you don't need a particular kind of education to intuit the relationships between objects and bodies, here. Watching these jugglers in this rural setting, I am reminded of modernist painting of the twentieth century – abstract forms based on the land, the sea, the sky. Like a Piet Mondrian grid, Boschetti and Wilson explore the limits of how we understand the real world. Throwing and catching these unforgiving rocks, they

neither submit to nature nor dominate it. Instead, they play at the edges, push at the borders, toy with the balance of power.

As the applause dies down for Boschetti and Wilson a group of schoolchildren, who had crept into the audience part way through, begin to sing. The FRESH STREET crowd turns to enjoy this new show, a demonstration of spontaneous island life – both responding to the inspiration of the visitors and displaying their own artistic heritage. Well, not quite. 'That's a school group visiting from the mainland,' McGee tells us as we reflect on the afternoon in the courtyard of his art centre. 'They saw an opportunity to make a few Euros.' Public space is never quite what you imagine. Or rather, it is everything that you imagine, and many things besides.

**Imagine: a body lying in the doorway in an upmarket part of town. Inside, the building is filled with works of art, drinks and canapés. Outside, visitors make small talk and rattle their statement jewellery. Periodically, people step over the body to move in and out.**

In his keynote speech, Jay Pather, a curator and professor of art in public space in South Africa, shows photographs of an artist lying

as the reactionary forces that will be flung in their way. (Note that Rousseau's book on democratic equality was banned in Paris, and ceremoniously burnt in Geneva, shortly after its publication.)

To illustrate his approach, Pather shows us a photograph of Cape Town from the air. On one side, the wealthy white suburbs: detached villas, lush lawns and swimming pools. On the other side, the townships filled

The mention of human rights has a particular resonance in the South African context, in which the historic wealth of the white elite was accrued via a brutally racist apartheid regime. 25 years since the system was dismantled, politically, there have been no financial reparations for black South Africans. The resulting economic segregation fits perfectly the shape that apartheid left (or did not in fact leave) behind. This twisted situation is, indeed, what members of the South African shack-dweller's movement, Abahlali baseMjondolo, mean when they describe their living conditions as 'the unjustified breach of the promise of a "better life" – a social contract that is not so much broken, as based on a pernicious and cruel lie.

Pather's aim, then, is not just to change what happens in Cape Town, but to change the entire way the city is imagined. As well as infection he talks about 'resistance' and 'pushing back.' From a European perspective, it's interesting to note this subtle difference in tone. In Europe, we tend to talk about healing and repair. Marriage, for example, describes art in public space as innately democratic, because it takes place in spaces that belong to everyone. The implication is that there is an ideal communal psyche – a democracy, or a social contract – to which we all belong.

**Imagine: a young girl reaches out a hand to touch the face of a giant puppet, its skin the same colour as hers.**

**'You cannot imagine,' Pather says, straying for a moment from his academically paced speech, 'how it feels for a black or brown South African to see yourself represented like this.'**

**For some, the nature of belonging is always in question.**



© Galway 2020, *Imramh: The Ship of Destiny* by Luxe

in the doorway of an art gallery during a private view. She is wrapped in blankets, stretched across the threshold, and almost completely ignored by the wealthy art goers who attend the event. As an image, it is both shocking and familiar. The sight of poverty cheek by jowl with wealth is present in most large cities, although 'sight' is perhaps the wrong word. So naturalised is the modern, urban cityscape to homeless people, beggars, street dwellers, that the presence of them as people is barely seen at all.

Or rather, it depends on who is looking. Pather's work troubles the nature of public space in South Africa in order to make people look at the overlooked, and in order for the overlooked to return the gaze. One of his festivals uses the metaphor of 'infection' to curate art in public space across Cape Town. It's a powerful word that signifies the rapid spread of new ideas, as well

with poor, black workers: shanty towns built from metal and dust. He describes the latter as labour camps, housing manual workers for the suburban elites. The difference in living standards, then, is not a mistake but a strategy: the townships are an asset exploited by and for the dominant class. This is why Pather's festivals draw audiences through disparate territories, beginning, for example, at the transport points that deposit commuters into their working day, and threading into the squares and avenues built with very different kinds of people in mind. In this way, his work echoes global movements based on the 'right to the city' – a concept of resistance to the capitalisation of urban space, as developed by the philosopher Henri Lefebvre. As the geographer David Harvey has put it, 'the freedom to make and remake our cities and ourselves is ... one of the most precious and yet neglected of our human rights'.

**Imagine: a torrent of tongues, as fast as a river. A language you don't speak. Words you can't understand.**

Of course, the historic wealth of Europe is based on the same brutal racism as South African apartheid: apartheid was, indeed, a European idea. At the borders of Europe, now, there are camps of displaced people, prevented from entering one of the richest regions of the world by policies of violent exclusion, outsourced to unaccountable enforcers. Many immigrants who do enter Europe are trafficked into modern slavery, and many more are kept in poverty or detention. When we talk about our public spaces, then, what kinds of public are we talking about? What kinds of spaces do we mean?

FRESH STREET#3 coincided with the 2019 European Parliament elections – a vote happening simultaneously across all 28 EU member states. This huge, democratic process is a moment of reimagining on a continental scale. At the time of meeting for FRESH STREET#3, we don't yet know the results of the elections, but we could pe-

haps guess at the sharpness of the divide. When the votes are counted, they will show a huge surge in representation for far-right, nationalist parties – like the German Alternative für Deutschland or the Flemish separatists Vlaams Belang – who campaigned on the basis of national pride, protectionism and immigration controls. And yet there is also a widespread surge for Green parties, committed to international collaboration in the face of climate change. Half of the EU's population, in other words, is voting for borders, and the other half for bridges. The moderate consensus that has dominated the EU for forty years has lost its security.

What are we trying to repair? What are we trying to return (to)? Where do we think we are going?

In his plenary session for FRESH STREET, the Italian anthropologist Paolo Apolito makes a moving case for how difference can be understood within a larger whole. His solution, articulated in Italian to a largely English-speaking audience, is jazz. Jazz is an art form that depends on disharmony as

much as harmony, on improvisation as much as practice. 'Change is always happening,' said the trumpeter Maynard Ferguson. 'That's one of the wonderful things about jazz music.' Crucially, Apolito's metaphor is not for multiculturalism – the failed experiment in which cultures live side by side, without acknowledging the need to adapt to a different context. Instead, he advocates for a consensus in which difference is not a matter of exclusion, but a principle for taking part.

What kind of borders are we protecting?

By speaking in Italian, Apolito is also making the point that homogeneity does not need to be the basis for understanding. His performance lecture is an effective demonstration of transnationalist ideals. But as we dance out of the lecture hall behind a band of musicians, I wonder if this is too much like easy listening.

What might it mean to infect our cities?  
What might it mean to make space?



© Declan Colohan

**Imagine: a group of visitors still tired from their journeys, orientating themselves to a strange city. For now, its streets still seem tangled, its landmarks unknown. Everyone is given a lamp to hold, and then we follow the sound of music. Somewhere up ahead there is a single person, dressed in white, her body twisting and flowing in a deep, slow dance.**

In this moment of anticipation – Galway perched on the edge of European Capital of Culture, the EU perched on the edge of a new parliament – it feels strange to be absorbed into LUXE's parade *Imramh - The Ship of Destiny*, as it moves slowly through the streets of Galway. It is one thing to sympathise with the politics of art in public spaces, but quite another to put your body inside the work of art, and to feel it happening to you.

I watch in silence, alone in a collection of strangers. Suddenly, the dancer makes way for a huge parade of glowing boats – and now, a dreamlike flotilla moves gloriously through the town. The sun has set, the lamp in my hand reflects the glow of the procession, people come out of pubs to take pictures, and I realise that I am no longer a stranger: I have become part of the body of this parade. It is an uncomfortable sensation: to be watched by people who constitute an audience, and whose gaze constitutes me as a performer. The route is slow and I have no idea where we are going. In this moment of exposure, I'm acutely aware of all the shifting parts of my

identity: as a woman, a tourist, an outsider, an Englishwoman in Ireland, a Jew in Europe. My identities rattle like costume jewellery. I don't know what to do with my hands.

Is this a form of consent, or participation? How do we know the difference?

Eventually, I relax into a moment I don't fully understand. The music flows through me and I know I 'pass' as someone who has a right to be here. In this moment of not-yet-meaning, I am alive to impossible truths: I do and do not belong. There are some things that I cannot imagine, and other things I don't want to.

My experience of public space is inextricably linked to my relative wealth, relative whiteness, relative education, relative age, and relative freedom of movement. My methods of understanding public space are drawn from Eurocentric world views. The ambivalence I feel inside a celebration of another community's public spaces is also the ambivalence inherent in these world views, as they are instrumentalised in the service of financial growth: am I 'authentically of Galway', or part of its 'cultural, economic and social development'?

Perhaps what Apolito is really saying, is that as well as listening to jazz, we need to commit fully to the improvisation of it: moment to moment, one to one, personal to political. This would reconcile the attention required

from art, with the criticality required in public space. It would reconcile the rights we have to the city, with the responsibilities we have to each other, including the others who are not being seen. And when I say reconcile, of course, I mean hold, uncomfortably like a series of spiky truths.

Here is a series of spiky truths.

Europe is built on place and displacement; movement and walls.

There are exclusion zones filled with bodies at the borders of our wealth.

Our belonging is based on an imbalance of power.

The artist Orlagh De Bhaldraithe walks onto a stage with flowers in her hair. 'I have a vision,' she says, 'of a day of global art and activism.' Her words come at the start of FRESH STREET but echo through all its experiences.

**Imagine: a parade of lights visible from one side of the water to the other.**

**Imagine: the sounds of harmonies and disharmonies rising above the waves.**

**Imagine: a tight wire stretching across the rapids.**

**Imagine: public space is all things you imagine, and many more besides.**

**How far out is the horizon?**



Mary Paterson is a writer and curator who works between performance, literature and visual art. Her ongoing projects include *Something Other* and *The Department of Feminist Conversations*.

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# GALWAY

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From island calm to city hustle – the final day of FRESH STREET returned the delegation to Galway for a programme focused on art in urban spaces.

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In the morning, following a working breakfast hosted by Ireland's Creative Europe Desk and a plenary discussion delving into the mysteries of the creative process, the group split. Half went to visit the studios of street arts heavyweights and parade maestros Macnas, in Fisheries Field; half to Claddagh Basin, the point where the River Corrib flows out into the ocean, to visit the site of *Wires Crossed*, a unique project conceived

by Galway Community Circus and École de Cirque de Bruxelles under Galway 2020.

The afternoon programme then played out in the lecture hall, seminar rooms, canteen, and long, long corridors of NUI Galway's Concourse Building, with smaller breakout groups tasked with getting into the nitty-gritty of creation and production in the street arts field. After that, a plenary session

with a hint of music, performances by Studio Eclipse and Maleta Company, and a last dance at Galway Rowing Club.

Reports of the day's sessions are given here, with accompanying interviews that extend the themes. But first a view from the inside, as local artist James Riordan gives a loving portrait of his rain-lashed hometown...



© Declan Colohan, *One Sink Two Float* by Studio Eclipse

## JAMES RIORDAN, GAILLIMH ABÚ

Described by Irish poet W.B. Yeats as the ‘Venice of the West’, Galway has long had a cultural reputation that belies its small size. Playwright, performer and local boy James Riordan takes a look at what draws artists to the city’s windswept streets, and what drives the work they make there.

The wet, wild, west of Ireland is not known for its blue skies and balmy sunshine. Oliver Cromwell, the English head of state, went as far as saying ‘To hell or to Connacht’ during a break between Empire expansion and Irish oppression. Charming. That was 1650, and in the time since, thankfully, things have changed in Galway, Connacht’s capital city. Wander down the cobbled streets on any weekend from March to November and, far from hell, there’ll be some festival or other in full swing, the buskers belting out Irish tunes, the divilment in the air palpable.

With its face to the Atlantic wind and its heart in the Irish language and music, the art made in this place is deeply of this place. From the influence of a large international artistic community who’ve long been falling for Galway’s charms, to its designation as the only bilingual city in the country, through the barren landscapes of Connemara and the fiery myths and folklore of the Celts and pagans, what’s created here has a deep sense of place running through it.

The energy of a place’s community is a good starting point when looking at the influence a place has on its art. The street theatre scene in Galway is dominated by Macnas, and the company’s loyal team of creatives based in and around the city. They are renowned for their big outdoor shows, 10-foot puppets, and hundreds-strong street parades at dusk. Working within a procession style allows the company of passionate makers, performers and technicians to overwhelm masses of spectators, sailors and giants passing them by as in a dream. The format conjures up travelling theatre troupes that would have passed this way in times gone by, and with Macnas (meaning ‘joyful abandonment’), audiences experience wild energies, ideas and images



© Declan Colohan, Macnas

all seamlessly stitched together and driven by a dedicated team of artists. It hits you like a wave from the nearby seashore; you hear it first, allow it to wash over you, and feel it long after the final fire barrel has been extinguished.

Thematically they take much from the mythical and their work is often directly inspired by local stories and characters. Take their 2017 offering, *Port na bPucaí*, which was steeped in West of Irishness. A procession of life as seen through the eyes of an old Aran Islands fisherman who is being summoned back to the sea, it featured troupes of keening ancestors and tortured hermit crab men, with ballerina Tern birds brought to life by a local ballet company. Indeed, the majority of the performers are local, loyal and happy to give their time, a big reason why the company is so successful and continues to root itself here.

As Noeline Kavanagh, artistic director of Macnas, puts it: ‘Landscape gives us ener-

gies, mood, memories, fault lines, thought lines, and is a great place to draw characters out of. It’s like they appear. There’s an epicness to the landscape and an epicness to making work on the street, and the dynamism between them is a really key connection.’

With annual audiences of over 100,000, and livestreaming to millions internationally, Macnas’s ability to connect with and maintain their international audiences comes from keeping a sense of the company’s roots, and from staying anchored in the community who work hard to create magic time and again. It could be performed in Beijing or Moscow, but the work is still made in a small field beside the Galway Rowing Club with the same core group of people.

The social issues facing a place often demand the attention of its makers and creators, and as the next generation detach themselves from physical spaces in favour

of electronic landscapes, another staple of Galway's street scene is a beautiful counterpoint. Galway Community Circus, started in 2002 and now with 650 weekly users in their social circus programme, is in symbiosis with its community and the issues that face it.

Ulla Hokkanen, the company's executive creative director, says: 'Our organisation is what it is only because it's based in Galway. I think Galway is a unique place with a special community feel; it has a certain feeling of isolation, being on the Atlantic Ocean, and yet also a feeling of being very connected to the rest of the World. Galway is an international multicultural city that attracts many "blow-ins" - and this is very true at Galway Community Circus (GCC).' The word Community is key to their name, and the outreach they do in schools, bringing an artistic, inclusive endeavour into the lives of many teenagers in the area, has a hugely positive effect on addressing issues like social isolation. The circus is aware of its deepening responsibilities and is acting accordingly.

*Wires Crossed*, GCC's Galway European Capital of Culture 2020 project will see 400 people from all walks of life cross the Claddagh Basin, and Galway's River Corrib, on a tightrope. This funambulistic project is about mental well-being, and is deliberately located by a river that has long been associated with suicide. It aspires to reinfuse life, hope and courage into landscapes carrying great sadness and to restore balance within the community. Following a huge call-out, GCC started running workshops in 2018. Everyone was welcome, and the project has created a new community, teaching new skills while raising awareness of a troubling local and national issue.

The sprawling, rocky landscape of Connemara and the long stretch of Atlantic Ocean that borders Galway with the Aran Islands dotting the horizon are visceral sights that capture the imagination of many of the artists here, just as the streets of Paris or lights of Tokyo have done for artists there. Art is not created in a vacuum and is always made somewhere.



© Declan Colohan

Turas Theatre Collective are a young street theatre company, based in the West of Ireland, whose first show, *Remnants*, was shown on Inis Oírr during FRESH STREET. Debbie Wright, co-founder of Turas Theatre Collective, notes: 'As a theatre practitioner living and working in Galway and the County, the landscape has a huge impact on the performance work that I create. I use strong tableau imagery that reflects the Atlantic Ocean, the Irish landscape, and the ebb and flow of nature and her emotions. This wildness and beauty is a constant inspiration for my work.'

Created from shared experiences in the refugee camps of Greece while working with Clowns Without Borders, and with strong themes of displacement and migration, *Remnants* has echoes of the Irish story of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, when crippling famines and economic depressions pushed people onto boats in search of better prospects in Britain, the US, and further afield. The West of Ireland suffered most from such emigration as it was historically poorer and more rural, and Galway now has one of the few Irish-speaking communities left in Ireland. Work inspired by Gaelic and the history of the people who spoke it is therefore common here.

I set up Brú Theatre in early 2018 after years spent working abroad, and as a *gael-*

*góir* I've always wanted to create work that showcases the beauty of the language and its traditions while remaining accessible to those who don't speak it. In the last year we've made outdoor, Irish language and site-specific performances in direct response to the old Irish speaking fishing communities of Galway. Red-haired women, foxes, pigs and feathers are all charged symbols in the old superstitions of the fishing communities, and we've taken these as a launching point in making pieces exploring loss, longing, and the livelihoods of those who have come before. We recently toured a site-specific show for small cottages with open fires, blending Sean Nós (traditional, acapella lamenting) and Basel mask work to tell the story of an old woman who waits for her fisherman to come home. The piece has been supported by the local councils, and having support for work inspired by the language of a place it's made in is vital for it to continue.

However, it's not all rosy in these parts. With a handful of underfunded theatres, a stagnant visual arts scene, and no dedicated concert venue, exhibition hall or rehearsal space for independent theatre-makers, the rise of Galway's status as the cultural capital of Ireland was unexpected. As a percentage of GDP, Ireland has one of the lowest rates of arts funding in Europe, and Dublin often tempts artists away with more com-

mercial opportunities. Galway European Capital of Culture 2020 is on the way but the attitude from the arts community has been mixed thus far, and the wide divide between established and emerging artists also adds to the challenges of sustainable careers in the arts here.

How do we as artists feel a sense of belonging to a place? The landscapes and long-ingrained traditions start to permeate. The communities that converge, converse, and create work ripe with references to the bricks and mortar, the sand and skies of a place, help to build an artistic language. Galway is small, and the weather can be determinedly damp. And yet the passion for making art in and of this place burns on. It is a place where people want to be, a sense that it is much more than the sum of its parts. There is something in the air here, a wildness to the Atlantic winds that creeps under the door and into the work. The rain may fall sideways occasionally, but the fire doesn't flinch.



© Mark Loudon, *Imramh: The Ship of Destiny* by Luxe



James Riordan is the artistic director of the Galway-based Brú Theatre. He is from Galway and trained at LISPA (London) and the APT (Berlin).

He is a performance director for Macnas and an Artist in Residence with Business to Arts. He is a participant on Creative Europe's Make a Move, an ASSITEJ Next Generation participant in 2019, and will be collaborating with Darren O'Donnell of Mammalian Diving Reflex in creating a new theatrical sport for Baboró 2020.

 [www.brutheatre.com](http://www.brutheatre.com)

# ONLY CONNECT

## BREAKOUT SESSION I: MAKING CONNECTIONS

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### FACILITATED BY

Mike Ribalta, Head of Professionals, Fira Tarrega (Spain)  
Tanja Ruiter, Co-Director, HH Producties (The Netherlands)

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### PANELLISTS

Julia Von Wild, Programmer, Tête-à-Tête Rastatt (Germany)  
Jerzy Zoń, Director of Theatre KTO and Krakow's International Street Theatre Festival (Poland)

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In the arts, connections between artists, producers and other stakeholders are vital not just to selling work but to making it. Conversations influence the ideas and concepts that underpin a project in its early stages. Professional connections bring resources and financing during production. And networks help artists to sell their work, sometimes before it is even finished – a situation that places the emphasis on reputation, trust and prior relationships. The question of this session was whether such a system works well, and how it could be improved.

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### The national and the international

Contributions from across the floor noted that there are significant variations between territories, and that the ease of making connections is affected by the scale and level of development of a country's street arts sector. Smaller scenes were generally thought to be easier in terms of establishing connections and communication, and to operate more as communities than competitive environments – even if they had fewer available resources. Larger scenes were considered harder to access, and in danger of perpetuating an 'in crowd' of those possessing the knowledge and relationships needed to make work.



© Declan Colohan

However, national networks are only one piece of the puzzle. Most artists will have to work internationally in order to make a living, and session participants pointed out that international networking remains easier

for professionals to finance and schedule. Most formalised networks are also run by and for professional bodies, raising the question of which connections really bear

on what work gets made: links between artists and promoters, or between promoters and other promoters who trade tips and recommendations?

## Blurring the lines



© Declan Colohan

With contributions from across the floor, the conversation soon ran up against the tensions created by the perceived hierarchy between producers/programmers and artists. This is a common debate and one characterised by some fatigue on both sides: among artists, who don't feel they're being listened to; and among programmers and festival organisers, who are struggling to maintain their own operations, and who are frustrated by the 'us' and 'them' attitude (especially when some directors are artists themselves). Perhaps both sides would like to view things as a partnership, but the question is how to make that partnership fair and effective when there is an inequality of re-

sources, when selection processes create a natural hierarchy, and when professional and economic risks are not always fully shared.

Invited to propose ways to start to untangle this knot of problems, session participants pointed to the need to 'blur' the lines between different actors by involving producers and audiences at earlier stages of the creative process. One suggestion was to encourage festivals to support emerging work with projects similar to NEST - New Emerging Street Theatre, an initiative of Spraoi festival and ISACS which offers mentoring to new Irish street arts companies along with the opportunity to present early-stage work to a festival audience. The value of such schemes is that they create a supportive and nurturing environment – one where the audience understands that what they are seeing is a work in progress, and artists can get feedback on new material.

Following this idea, the role of festivals was a particular talking point. While artists generally want festivals to step up and play a more active role in facilitating their ability to research and create work, in many cases these festivals are operating within larger cultural policy frameworks that place a greater focus on the audience. And some programmers themselves see the audience as the ones who ultimately enable creative work – through their economic contribution, and through a willingness to accept risks in festival programming. The audience

is their first responsibility, not the development of the artist or art form. In light of this, a widely held view was that artists should be outgoing in their search for connections, and look outside of festivals and more traditional receiving venues. One suggestion was to investigate universities, some of whom can play a role in mentoring and supporting local, emerging artists. Even if some of them don't have money, universities – partly as a result of staff cuts – often have space.

Bringing out some optimistic notes, the session nonetheless aired familiar grievances. Put simply: it is very difficult to survive as an artist; it is very difficult to run a festival. Creating and maintaining connections under such pressure presents an enduring challenge.

### Links & Recommendations

🌐 [NEST](#)

● Ása Richardsdóttir and Lene Bang Henningsen's guide for artists, *It Starts with a Conversation*: [www.itstartswithaconversation.org](http://www.itstartswithaconversation.org)



## INTERVIEW: NULLO FACCHINI, CANTABILE 2



**Nullo Facchini started working professionally with theatre from 1981 as director assistant at Teatro Nucleo in Italy. In 1983 he founded his own company called Cantabile 2, based in Denmark and which he still directs today.**

**You've said that when you founded Waves in 1987 it was mostly a way to create professional connections for your artistic company, Cantabile 2...**

Yes, in '87, but that was an exception. We were a young company, new to Copenhagen, and we had the idea of using the festival as a networking event and an excuse to meet other companies. It was meant to be a one-off. Then in 1990 we were invited to move from Copenhagen to Vordingborg and become a regional theatre. The city, with a population of 14,000, had a 600-seat theatre that was barely being used.

In Denmark, most regional theatres have to deliver a certain number of shows or reach a certain size of audience. We knew that with the kinds of performance we were doing we wouldn't achieve the same numbers, so we revived Waves as a way of bringing in thousands of people in the week of the festival. That way we'd have total freedom for the rest of the year.

But in our first year we saw that this was a city that was not used to going to the theatre. We were presenting shows, but to empty seats. The solution, in 1991, was to take some of our work onto the streets – and this totally transformed our relationship to the city.

Today, Waves welcomes 20,000-25,000 people over one week, which in a city of 14,000 is a good audience. My model was always the Mediterranean style of festival. I'm Italian myself, and in Italy there is an unwritten rule that you do theatre festivals in small villages, because in a big city they will disappear. In Vordingborg every human being – every dog and every cat – knows that the festival is going on, and this gives them a sense of ownership.

**Waves doesn't exist as a separate legal entity, but is instead an activity, or an artistic production, of Cantabile 2. Why organise it this way?**

In my opinion it has several advantages, but the main thing is we retain artistic control of the festival. We have a free hand in the same way as we do on any performance. There is no external influence, and this also allows us to maintain a continuity. I've been the artistic director of the festival since it began, and so I have a very precise understanding of what the city has seen, what it's seen enough of, how we can renew ourselves...

**Are there any difficulties that come with this dual role as a festival and artistic company?**

When I meet other artistic companies I can feel sometimes that it's very present in their minds: we are the colleagues who run a festival. This bothers me a little – the moment when I think I'm talking to a colleague and suddenly realise they are trying to sell me a show.

In international meetings like IETM or CINARS we are careful to hide on our material that Waves even exists. We go as artists and to meet other artists or producers, but the moment people discover we have a festival it totally changes the perspective of the conversation. I can understand why it happens. It's probably the only downside of having a festival.

**At the same time you used to have an open application process where artists could apply to Waves via your website...**

That was part of a European project, led by a Belgian partner. There were some criteria: the companies had to be young, working in non-verbal forms and keeping to a low budget. Every year a jury of six festival directors would choose three shows to programme. So we had an application form on our website, and would get around 2000 applications each time. We did it for six years, and in fact it was very interesting – we would find people we'd never heard of. So it felt good and precious; we were really discovering young talent. But the work of viewing all the videos became too much.

That project doesn't exist anymore, but of course we still receive thousands of emails every year from groups wanting to come to Waves. We have a form reply asking for short trailers and saying we can't guarantee that we'll be able to watch them, but sometimes it happens that there's a last-minute cancellation and we jump into a hundred of these applications and find a replacement.

### Links & Recommendations

[!\[\]\(87a5c5a1c76280c2f1cd158a8009530f\_img.jpg\) Waves Festival](#)

# TRUST ME

## BREAKOUT SESSION II: RED TAPE

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### FACILITATED BY

Jens Frimann Hansen, Director of Passage Festival (Denmark)

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### PANELLISTS

Sho Shibata, Executive Producer, Stopgap Dance Company (UK)

Dagmara Gumkowska, Teatr Śląski (Poland)

Matthias Rettner, General Director, PAN.OPTIKUM (Germany)

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**'Red tape hits the street arts hard.'** Opening the discussion Jens Frimann Hansen, the director of Denmark's Passage festival, sketched out the state of play. Compared with more established arts, street theatre is not surrounded by conventions, traditions and institutions to protect and define it. It is an art form that must define itself – within the public space, at the moment of performance – and is often rooted in qualities of surprise, luck and spontaneity. Does excessive bureaucracy take away this immediacy? Does it cut the thread to the origins of street arts in a rebellious counterculture? Does it protect, and, if so, who does it protect?

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### A personal touch

Dagmara Gumkowska, a manager of international collaboration projects, spoke of her experience working in Poland, where laws concerning the use of public space are comparatively underdeveloped. This can provide freedom for artists, but also 'gives the authorities a lot of space to make decisions' and places power in the hands of individuals. Among panellists and others in the room, this was seen to be something of a trade-off. As personal relationships, and trust, build up over time, certain barriers can be bypassed. Trust acts like an informal accreditation, flexible in

the actions it enables but with no 'portability' (the confidence of one official won't necessarily bring the support of another, and especially won't carry to other countries). One participant, suggesting the Italian situation is similar to Poland, described reliance on trust as a 'medieval relationship'.

An absence of formal channels can also make it difficult to know who to communicate with. Gumkowska described the trail of permissions needed to organise an event in Poland: city council, blue light services (police, ambulance,

fire), and then property owners. In the case of a project at a railway station, different aspects of the site – the building, the track, the land it rested on – had all been sold off to different companies as part of a privatisation process.

As a final point, Gumkowska drew a distinction between smaller cities and the larger ones who pay more attention to their public image, and put a focus on interesting projects and on high quality work. Among smaller cities, it 'often doesn't matter what you organise – and the safer the better'.

### Hidden motives

Among all panellists – and a number of session participants – the UK was noted as a country with especially stringent rules for health and safety.

Sho Shibata, executive producer of Stopgap Dance Company, described how

his work often put him in conflict with visa offices as he worked to get international artists into the UK, or UK artists elsewhere in the world. Stopgap's 2017 piece *The Road* was commissioned by the British Council in Sub-Saharan Africa and given seed funding in order to invite one artist

from Uganda, Oscar Ssenyonga, and two from Kenya, Silvester Barasa and Joseph Kanyenje, to come to the UK and collaborate with two of Stopgap's dancers. The British Council explained that the visa application process for Uganda and Kenya would be the same, and in fact both would

be processed by the same office in South Africa.

The applications were submitted at the same time, to the same office, but the Kenyan artists received their visas and the Ugandan artist was turned down. The authorities said that they were concerned that if the Ugandan artist was granted a visa there was a risk he would go missing in the UK. Two further applications were rejected: first with the explanation that there wasn't significant proof of income to qualify

Ssenyonga as an artist, then that receipts produced in response were not genuine.

Such experiences highlight that a process that is supposedly objective, or at least legalistic, can be guided by hidden agendas. In the UK, anti-immigration policies spread outward from the Home Office, and ultimately affect who can come into the country and who cannot.

Applying with the same artists to work for five days in the Netherlands – by invitation

of Holland Dance Festival – Stopgap secured visas without trouble. However, the R&D in the Netherlands, with four artists already advanced in the creation and the other only able to follow the early stages digitally, created an imbalance in their starting points, created friction in the process, and took the momentum out of the project. Stopgap had had plans for the future, including a UK tour. But looking at the state of its development, and at the likely prospect of further visa issues, the project was shelved.

## The price of experience

When Matthias Rettner first started to work with the German company PAN.OPTIKUM a contract was one and a half pages and a tech rider fit on a single sheet. Both are now substantially larger, but, says Rettner, 'it is only experience'. The company has bulked out its paperwork to avoid repeating the same misunderstandings and to clear the way for concentrating on artistic work.

This is, of course, the other side of the story: regulations increase because of accidents, and what we think of as red tape is often the aftermath of serious and sometimes fatal errors. Rettner gave the example of the 2000 Enschede fireworks disaster, which saw the massive explosion of a pyrotechnics factory in the Netherlands. In the years after, the use of pyrotechnics, which had previously been simple, was tightly regulated.

Regulation becomes bureaucracy when a law loses its original purpose, but still takes time and costs money for those who must follow it. Rettner points out as well that regulation is 'a great business', and while the

health and safety industry has grown large and far-reaching, individual health and safety managers vary in their competence. 'Don't feel secure just because you have one.'

In highlighting the practical reality faced by companies, Rettner gave a small tour of some of the latest health and safety laws spreading across Europe: how an object higher than 5m, or with a surface area of more than 100 m<sup>2</sup>, is classed as a portable building, and needs expensive technical approval before it can be used in public space; or how the NC90 certifications (1090-2 and 1090-3) covering respectively steel and aluminium welding, are becoming a widespread (and quite expensive) requirement.

Of course, these rules also exist to prevent dangerous oversights. And so Rettner has settled on a pragmatic view: whatever the regulation, find a way to deal with it. Often this means taking an individual approach. Rettner advised that when handling international shipping, for instance, it can be best to avoid larger providers. With smaller ope-

rations it's possible to oversee things personally – to go to the harbour and ensure that equipment is unloaded as needed, and tackle problems that may arise.

In the end, this personal approach would seem to be inescapable. Whether artists operate by the contract or the handshake, whether authorised by certificate or reputation, they frequently find themselves in the grey areas outside, and beyond, the red tape.

### Links & Recommendations

- 🌐 [Stopgap Dance Company](#)
- 🌐 [Aktionstheater PAN.OPTIKUM](#)
- [Organiser un événement artistique dans l'espace public](#)



# INTERVIEW: SHO SHIBATA, STOPGAP DANCE COMPANY



After completing a degree in philosophy and social psychology at the LSE (London), Sho worked at the Arts Council England, South East and joined Stopgap Dance Company in 2008 to manage touring, outreach and dance development projects. He began producing Stopgap’s outdoor productions in 2009 and he is now the executive producer of the company.

**Policy and regulation have been instrumental in improving diversity in the arts. Are such laws and regulations viewed as ‘red tape’ or has the industry accepted them?**

I think in many ways the regulations and policies surrounding inclusion have been very welcomed in the arts. In the outdoor arts touring circuit in the UK there’s been a lot of emphasis on making festivals accessible to disabled audiences and disabled performers, so I think there’s been some good work being done on this front. The programming and the commissioning has also been very inclusive. In the UK, this kind of work has come in partly as a result of the Equality Act that the government put in place about a decade ago.

But at the same time there are still quite a lot of loopholes and you do get people paying lip service to the idea of accessibility. They probably wouldn’t admit it, but some organisations do the bare minimum to make things more accessible.

Education is a big example of that. If you look at higher education in the dance sector it’s still quite traditionalist. Even when you look at youth schools the syllabus is still very balletic, and is sort of educating everybody to try to pursue this idea of a perfect shape and perfect body that someone set, subjectively, well over a century ago. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century that’s a very outdated idea, and yet it’s still fundamental in basic dance education. And obviously it’s very, very inaccessible for disabled people. A lot of the circus and theatre schools may well say the same on their side – you can see there’s a lack of disabled people coming through the education system in those sectors.

So the mainstream is still very uninclusive, and that’s an example of the legislation being ignored. Everything is supposed to be equal access, but in practice organisations like dance conservatories and schools can still effectively exclude disabled people. There’s a disconnect between what it says in law and policy and what happens in practice, and that filters out into the wider arts sector and society as a whole.

**There are also some grey areas in the wording of various laws...**

Yeah, there are some massive grey areas, which tend to force these very time-consuming negotiation processes. With Stopgap we’ve sometimes been able to use that to our advantage because we’re an organisation with staff who can keep at it. But a lot of disabled people who are working on a freelance basis just can’t pursue things in the same way.

**Many funding bodies want to encourage diversity, and some do it directly by making it a condition of subvention. How do you feel about this top-down approach?**

Well, I think companies like Stopgap are definitely beneficiaries of it because it’s opened a lot of doors for us as an inclusive company working with disabled and non-disabled artists, and made more programmers want to work with us. Perhaps they only did it because they had to tick a box, but that’s still a way in. So I’m all for it because we know we can deliver.

And in the UK, I think the Arts Council’s long-term strategy has worked. I think the UK might be the only country in the entire world where there are multiple inclusive diverse or-

ganisations thriving in the industry. When you look at England and Scotland, there are lots of us – both regularly funded organisations and smaller projects. You don’t see that kind of breadth and strength anywhere else, and I think it’s because the Arts Council made diversity a priority a long time ago.

**If regulation is a top-down, legalistic approach, what are some initiatives in this area that start from the bottom-up?**

Well, I think in some ways the top-down approach is there because the initial pressure came from the community, and from various civil rights movements stretching back for decades.

But I think the community has also responded to show that it’s possible for disabled people to become excellent dancers – and for people of all backgrounds to become excellent artists – if they’re given the right investment and support and opportunities. I think the UK is kind of a beacon of proof that equal opportunities, when done correctly and well, will bear results. But I think there’s still a long way to go. There are little pockets of organisations doing the work, but I think until the whole landscape really shifts we still have a long way to go in making inclusivity the norm.

## Links & Recommendations

- [Stopgap Dance Company](#)
- [OutdoorArtsUK Access Toolkit](#)

# LEARNING ON AND OFF THE STREET

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## BREAKOUT SESSION III: EDUCATION

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### FACILITATED BY

Bruno Costa, Co-director of Bússola (Portugal)

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### PANELLISTS

Marie Yvonne Capdeville, Choreographer, Graduate of FAI-AR – Formation supérieure d'art en espace public (France)

Dr Niamh NicGhabhann, Assistant Dean of Research, University of Limerick (Ireland)

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There is little formalised education for the street arts, and some like it that way: 'You have to learn the street on the street.' For others, education programmes are valuable crucibles of experimentation and exchange. But as this breakout session underlined, the involvement of the education sector is not limited to practical training. Through its research activities and analysis, and by leveraging weighty connections to other institutions and policymakers, the sector has a role to play in promoting street arts within a larger cultural field.

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### The street arts bookshelf

For Dr Niamh NicGhabhann, Assistant Dean of Research at University of Limerick and course director for its MA in Festive Arts, the education sector can contribute on three levels.

First, it can bring a greater sense of the 'deep roots' of arts performed in public space. NicGhabhann pointed to examples like *commedia dell'arte*, medieval mystery plays, travelling circuses, travelling musicians, and street performance in fairs and markets as forms that have been 'absolutely central' to cultural experience, but remain under-represented in academic literature. Research activities can be part of a wider effort to 'give street arts back its history' within a canon of academic theory.

At the second level, academia can provide evidence-based data and research on the impact of street arts. Studies that focus on the audience experience, or on the audience demographics that street arts reaches, provide a strong base from which to lobby policymakers and funding bodies.

Finally, at the third level, the education sector can create opportunities for 'creative



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practice research' – a mode of research where the artist thinks and investigates through their own artistic work rather than having that work examined by an external commentator.

Each of these three levels of work drive in the same direction: as several participants

in the session pointed out, anyone studying street arts currently has to do it through the lens of other disciplines. 'You go to so many shelves because there is no street arts shelf. You go to architecture, you go to urban theory or theatre studies, sociology, anthropology... [street arts] is still in the process of being formed.'

## A changing form

Street arts' lack of visibility in research fields is reflected in the wider arts sector, and, ultimately, in the work that's programmed into venues and festivals. On this note, some session participants expressed anxiety that street arts are being pushed aside by dance, circus and visual arts companies moving into the outdoor space (whether driven by a legitimate desire to work in this area, or by the search for new funding opportunities). Unlike the street arts, these other sectors have dedicated systems of practical educa-

tion that start at a young age and take students all the way to higher education.

But if the feeling of being muscled out, or of losing a tradition, was in the air, then it was complicated by a general feeling that street arts is less of a defined form and more an 'approach' or a 'process'. If that's the case, then what exactly is being pushed aside?

Marie Yvonne Capdeville, a recent graduate of the French school FAI-AR, explained that she sees the school as not so much offering

a training to become a certain type of practitioner as hosting an open-ended process that cultivates a 'reflection about yourself and your approach to your discipline'.

In her own view, she accepts the openness of the street arts field but makes a personal distinction between street arts and creation in public space: street arts play on the street or in the public square; creation in public space can play in any public location not dedicated to performance (hospitals, galleries, churches, etc.).

## Education everywhere

What might be missing from practical education, or what to work on in the future? For Capdeville, it is the notion of a 'precise dramaturgy of public space', and training on how to 'read' space. NicGhabhann linked this to the idea of exploring a 'philosophy of space' that considers the relationship we have to space and which we experience constantly in our day to day lives: 'Where do I feel safe, where do I feel connected, where do I feel rushed? How do I sense or understand this space that I'm in?'

Several participants proposed that education could take place outside of schools, perhaps in festival contexts, though one festival producer explained that she had 'no power' to decide on the inclusion of education activities, and that the money for the festival came from the local city, which was focused on impact for audiences and not on artistic development. As such, the responsibility perhaps rests on individuals: as one participant said, it should be up to those lucky enough to have received education to find ways to share it.

### Links & Recommendations

- 🌐 [FAI-AR](#)
- 🌐 [MA in Festive Arts, University of Limerick](#)



## INTERVIEW: JEAN-SÉBASTIEN STEIL, FAI-AR



Jean-Sébastien Steil is the director of FAI-AR, the high school for artistic creation in public space. He's also the president of apCAR, the organisation in charge of managing the Cité des arts de la rue, in Marseille. From 2003 to 2011, as the coordinator of the new IN SITU European network, he impuled artistic and cultural partnerships all over Europe and in the Mediterranean area.

### FAI-AR is developing an online course, *Create in Public Space*. Why?

There is a lack of analytical content and documentary resources in the field of creation in public space. There's also a lack of visibility at the professional level and among arts students and general audiences. Producing a free, bilingual MOOC seemed to us to be a way to share our knowledge and, at the same time, to give visibility to artists working in this field.

The course itself will be structured in three chapters, each with its own theme. First, Scenography: how to work with a space that is not a stage, art gallery, black box, or white cube. Second, Dramaturgy: how the space itself and what goes on there affects the artistic proposal. And finally, The Audience: how to understand the audience as a transformative factor in street arts, and how to build immersive or participative pieces.

### Some artists feel that the street arts can only be learned on the street...

When FAI-AR was created there was an older generation of artists who said, 'Street arts doesn't need its own university, its own academy, because we learned everything from experience.'

For me, it's true that we can't teach people how to be artists in public space. We can't tell them what to do, or what they should say in the street. Instead it's a question of teaching them to be free in the way that they create.

We don't teach street arts as if it were a field of definite knowledge. It's not a defined discipline in the way that classical music, or playing the violin, or ballet is. For me, street

arts is not a discipline. It's a path to a different kind of artistic expression. In terms of skills, you can work with theatre, dance, music, digital arts, everything. But what we know is that when we move art outdoors something happens to transform it. That transformation is what education can address: it teaches us to use the urban space not as another kind of theatre stage, but to take a more difficult, more complex, more interesting approach in creating work in relation with the city and the audience.

We have to be aware of how art transforms space and how space transforms art, and that is something that can be taught and analysed. And it's better for us to learn from the experience of 30 years of street arts creation, so that the new generation can avoid making the same mistakes...

### The street arts education sector has remained comparatively small. What's your hope for its future?

For me, we don't necessarily need a lot of schools, because the professional network dedicated to our field is quite small. And at the European scale we don't need hundreds of specialised artists; instead we need to inform and stimulate artists from other fields.

In France, street arts became a specialism. Now it's a kind of family, a tribe. This generation from the 70s and 80s, they all know each other, they think and consider themselves like a family. Then when you look to another country, like the Netherlands, there isn't that same history of structuring a specialised cultural sector. It's more flexible, less defined. Contemporary artists create their work in art galleries but sometimes they can make site-specific pieces. It all depends on

the project, the meaning, the message, and the intention of the artist – not on their professional specialisation.

My hope is that more artists, from every field, will become interested in the possibilities and opportunities of creating in public space, and that theatres will catch on to programming this work – something which is already happening, with more and more outdoor and rural projects.

And thinking of the future, I always keep in mind that public space is political space, and that art in public space is linked to collective issues. In France this year we've had the *gilets jaunes* movement. The yellow jacket was a symbol, a costume, a kind of scenography. For me artists can speak to people's anxieties, their common worries about social problems, migration, the climate. The artist has to be linked to reality, to the problems of the world, and working in public space is a way to be close to that.

### Links & Recommendations

[Create in Public Space](#)

# THE CHANGING CITY

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## BREAKOUT SESSION IV : URBAN ENVIRONMENT

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### FACILITATED BY

Angus MacKechnie, Executive Director, OutdoorArtsUK (UK)

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### PANELLISTS

Giulia Cantaluppi, PhD in Territorial Planning and Public Policy,  
University of Venice (Italy)

Kevin Leyden, Professor of Political Science and Sociology  
National University of Ireland, Galway (Ireland)

Eleanor Barrett, Director, The Brick Box (UK)

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Introducing the session, Angus MacKechnie, the executive director of OutdoorArtsUK, described the spaces he cycles through on the way into work: Battersea Square (a place to eat); Knightsbridge and Eaton square (surrounded by fantastic architecture and containing beautiful spaces – but all privately owned); Hyde Park (home to many a historic statue) and Speakers' Corner (since the 19<sup>th</sup> Century a free stage for anyone who wants to address the public); Bloomsbury and Brunswick Square (encased by social housing from the 70s, now gentrified and commercialised); finally arriving at work on Charlton Street (at the centre of commuter London, and a diverse area with a large Muslim community). All of these spaces could be called 'the city centre', and yet they represent a massive diversity of use, design, ownership and access. As much as they are social spaces, they are places for commemoration, protest and demonstration; as much as they are places to meet and work, they are sites of occupation, celebration and dissent. How can we work in, and with, these spaces?

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### Planned use

While acknowledging that the uses and identities of spaces can be complex and unpredictable, Kevin Leyden, a Professor of Political Science and Sociology at the National University of Ireland, opened his presentation by reminding that built environments are made 'for humans by humans', and as a result are the products of planning, design, public policy, and, ultimately, politics.

In recent years, he explained, there has also been a shift in urban planning. While traditionally most city centre environments were designed for mixed-use and pedestrian traffic, over the last 60 years urban planning has recentred itself around roads and automobiles, bringing with it segregated areas like office and industrial parks. This trend lessens opportunities for conversation and

social interaction – the lifeblood of culture and creative work – and brings a number of other negative externalities, such as pollution, expensive travel, and impacts on health.

What is required, in Kevin's view, is for city leaders to connect us to arts and culture in the places we live, and to create public spaces which are beneficial for the people, the community and the environment. This is partly about good design and planning, but also requires changes in laws and regulations to encourage funding and policies that enable arts and culture.

The subject of urban planning prompted a number of comments on car use, with one session participant pointing to the example of Athenry – an Irish town that has a beauti-

ful 13<sup>th</sup> century castle and public square surrounded by cars (making it 'the finest medieval car park in Europe'). Residents want to pedestrianise the area, but businesses want cars to bring in commerce. This friction between business and social interests is common, but can manifest in different ways. Another participant gave the example of Venice: cars aren't a problem, but tourists are. Spaces are flooded with people, and yet they are not 'social' spaces for local residents – an extreme case that highlights the importance of balance in designing urban spaces, and of involving communities in decisions about their use.

## The urban village

Eleanor Barrett, co-director of The Brick Box, spoke on the value of involving local residents in regeneration projects. From 2013-2016, Brick Box worked with Newham Council's regeneration team to create projects under a motorway flyover in Canning Town – an otherwise derelict patch of land at the heart of what was considered to be a 'problem' area of the city. When Brick Box started the project the police were against them going into a space that was considered unsafe.

Undeterred, they worked with the community for three months in the lead-up to their first project, A13 Green, which saw the space under the flyover transformed into an 'urban village green' every Friday night for ten weeks. Residents from all walks of life came out to claim the space – and made it their own. It was a temporary event with a lasting impact. The project proved not only that people can be trusted (the safety concerns of the local authorities were unfounded) but that communities will work together and step up to reclaim the spaces around them.



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Brick Box has since moved out of London and into Bradford, with the idea of working outside of institutional circles. Its activities now include the Bradford Spaces Service, an initiative to open empty city centre spaces to creative, charitable projects. In 2018, Brick Box organised Bradford Bubble Up, a three-day water-themed fes-

tival which put street theatre, breakdancing and music into the public space, and transformed an unusually steep road into a 100m waterslide. The event was well received, and the local Business Improvement District will now host the slide every summer...

## Reclaiming the space

Finally, Giulia Cantaluppi presented Temporiuso.net, a Milan-based collective of architects, urban planners, activists and researchers that works to reopen, and make available for cultural use, abandoned or disused spaces – from defunct railway lines and old terminals, to unfinished constructions, ex-industrial sites and empty offices. In most cases organisations receive space rent-free, but are asked to develop a business plan that demonstrates they can cover extra costs (including utilities), while generating activities that give back to the life of the city.

One Temporiuso.net project, Palazzina 7, redeveloped Milan's former general market – a plaza space bordered by old Liberty buildings that had lain abandoned for 20

years. In the redevelopment, the ground floor was given over to local associations and artisans, while the first floor was allocated for student accommodation, with residents sharing responsibility for maintenance. This mixed-use format ultimately supported co-working spaces, a time bank for local organisations, and an apartment for students. The outside space, open to the public, was transformed with gardens and spaces for activities and relaxation. Another Temporiuso.net project, MADE in MAGE, opened a new incubator space at the ex-industrial site Magazzini Generali Falck, accommodating 35 companies and young creators working in fashion and sustainable design. What was planned as a temporary project became a permanent arrangement,

and helped to turn the political tide in Milan: the local government has become more interested in supporting schemes that can attract young people back to the city and persuade them to make their home there.

### Links & Recommendations

- 🌐 [OutdoorArtsUK](#)
- 🌐 [The Brick Box](#)
- 🌐 [Temporiuso](#)



## INTERVIEW: HEBA EL-CHEIKH, MAHATAT FOR CONTEMPORARY ART



Heba El-Cheikh is an outdoor art producer and cultural manager. In 2011, She co-founded Mahatat for Contemporary Art. Through arts in public spaces and community arts projects, she aims at decentralizing art to make it accessible and meaningful to all.

**Mahatat has organised a number of projects, such as City Shadows in Port Said, that work in abandoned spaces. What's it like to undertake this work in Egypt?**

In the case of City Shadows, we'd been working in Port Said for a year, giving workshops and organising labs for emerging artists, when we had the opportunity to do some research into this idea of reviving abandoned spaces.

Port Said is a very old city with a unique history; the architecture is very rich. It has an old-world atmosphere but is also a big, cosmopolitan city. We walked around looking at the old buildings and hotels and the housing built for all the engineers who used to work on the Suez Canal. The city has a lot of Italian and French influences, with these beautiful wooden balconies everywhere, and so the first thing you think is, 'Oh, wow – it would be great to take one of these old palaces or cinemas and turn it into a space.' But the reality is that in Egypt this is almost impossible, or you'd have to be a big investor to do it.

So what happened is we scouted out the city and found a derelict backyard between three buildings. It wasn't really owned by anyone – it was on the borderline of three properties, at the back of an old historic villa. It was a non-place, full of trash. It was on the margins. That's where we worked.

To be in public space in Egypt we work on the borderline of a lot of things – what is public and what is not, what is permitted and what is not. When people give us a wondering look and ask what we're doing, their

confusion is a good thing – it means we can be in public space. We're not a political demonstration, or a film shoot, or anything else that's recognised and regulated...

**A lot of projects that work with abandoned spaces, or in urban space more generally, don't last long. How do you feel about this temporary quality?**

Working in public space, I agree its ephemeral. With a one-off project you never know what will come from it. But we never claimed that our work would have a big impact; at most we say that we're an audience's first experience of live, artistic performance, and that this experience is important.

In one neighbourhood we did an upcycling project because there were a lot of workshops in the area and it's full of raw material. You can walk on the street and find tonnes of wood and plastic.

So we did this workshop with local people and built a big sculpture. And it was good and bad – people didn't understand the point of the sculpture, but at the same time it helped to clean the neighbourhood up a bit, and we put in some upcycled benches. So it changed, slightly, the public space.

But after two or three weeks the sculpture was completely gone. Some people thought it was a success – that this sculpture lasted three weeks, it's a sign of success. Some said that, no, it's a failure because it's gone. This was the conversation.

In another neighbourhood, Ezbet Khairallah, we talked with local people and partners and ended up making a community art space – a whole theatre built from upcycled

materials. We didn't go to the area thinking we would make a theatre; we just wanted to do something for the public space.

The stage is still there. Afterward we never claimed it was ours by putting a sign up, because if we did it would be broken the next day, or we would be blackmailed to pay money for maintenance. And I'm very open to the idea that the stage will be pulled down at some point because people need the wood. It's fine if this is what happens, but for now it's still there.

This is an impact, but we didn't plan it. We don't have power over people and don't know how they'll react to our artistic interventions. I was really glad to know the stage is still there and the project is a success, but at the same time I don't claim that I know everything about this area, that I can live there myself, that I can claim we change any lives. A project *might* change lives, but the claiming itself is where the problems start.

### Links & Recommendations

[Mahatat for Contemporary Art](#)