

## Transactions of Trust

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Taken from [art@work] 2011 artists residency programme publication

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Speaking at the Global Irish Economic Forum in October 2011 actor Gabriel Byrne said that he is, 'interested in bringing the worlds of Business and the Arts closer together, to see what it is that we have in common and to see how mutually we can help each other.'<sup>i</sup>

Perhaps it would have been timely for this Cultural Ambassador for Ireland to have taken a trip to County Roscommon on his way back to New York to witness firsthand how a longstanding model of Business and the Arts can coalesce; with integrity, shared labour and creativity as common links.

In the realm of the arts, words such as *collaboration* and *creativity* are commonplace, both in conversation and in practice, as a means of knowledge production and of partnership, and also in a bid to secure the funding and resources required to realise ideas and projects. It is curious then that these same words are commonplace in the domain of business, often attached to aspirational plans for economic recovery.<sup>ii</sup> In the area of business, one definition of collaboration is 'A general cooperative arrangement in which two or more parties (which may or may not have any previous relationship) work jointly towards a common goal.'<sup>iii</sup>

Create, the Irish national development agency for collaborative arts in social and community contexts, develops this further by saying that collaborative arts 'is widely seen as one of the most vibrant and challenging areas of arts practice, requiring skills of negotiation and project management.'<sup>iv</sup>

Many commonalities emerge from the areas of Business and the Arts, which in the past were regarded as being at variance to each other. Artists are both aware, and in some ways relieved, that they do not have a monopoly on creativity. This year's *art@work* programme signals some of these commonalities, revealed across a diverse range of business practice, including banking, childcare and stone masonry, and an equally diverse range of arts practice including visual art, sound art, installation, critical writing and film.

One discernible link is the transaction of trust. Through the programme, Roscommon County Council tentatively brokers an unusual situation whereby artists, hosted by local businesses, are given access to and welcomed into the workplace. In turn they have the opportunity to become embedded, and to relocate their creative practices into the world of business and trade; to situate their art making processes in the midst of various interactions between workers, their businesses and customers. As a result it is both understandable and necessary that the levels of embeddedness that the artist can avail of varies depending on the sensitive nature of some of the business transactions and due to requirements for privacy and security in how the businesses interact with their public(s), as broached by Marie Brett and Caroline Conway. While these interactions do focus on business, the artists observed that they were also anchored on a fundamental exchange between people. The artists noted the human aspects of the business transactions, witnessing what they described as a lightness of touch and the need, where appropriate, for a sense of humour, as indicated by Jeffrey Gormly.

Another common thread which emerges is the need for both Business and the Arts, particularly collaborative practice, to invest time in the development of good working relationships; within the

team, within the workplace and between the many stakeholders that inform a project, be it a new business venture or an emerging art project.

Along with commonalities some distinctions also arise. For example differences emerged in terms of work patterns, particularly with regard to pace, between artists and their 'temporary co-workers', to borrow a phrase from Róisín Loughrey. The fast pace of the business world stood in contrast to the timeframes usually employed by artists in order to develop ideas and to progress projects. The artists spoke of a clear desire to ring fence time in this way – time to reflect, to think, to question, to digest, and to unravel research, comments and conversations. The artists also spoke of the benefit and resource of time to chase an idea, even if its eventual endpoint were akin to that of a *cul de sac*, finding it better to have tried and failed than not to have tried at all, as disclosed by Marie Brett.

Coming back to the business definition of collaboration and the presence of common goals, one accepted reality for both Business and the Arts is an awareness of the need to protect valuable resources in order to foster growth and progress. While the term *resources* does entail funding and financial backing, its wider definition also includes the assets of knowledge, experience and time. Are these assets traded and exchanged freely in the business workplace, where the common goal is the progress of the company and the retention of jobs, in what is at times a precarious job market? Do these assets flow easily in the art world, in a highly competitive field, often occupied by individuals striving to make their projects and practices stand out from the crowd?

Within the growing restraints of recessionary times the relevance of programmes such as *art@work* get drawn into focus. One repeat comment which appears from the Businesses that applied for and hosted the residencies was that the process provides an opportunity to look at their business from a different perspective, as mentioned by Finbarr Feely from Feelystone, and at times providing an opportunity for customers and friends to look at the staff in a different, very personal and meaningful way, as revealed by Laszlo Kenderesci from the Organic Garden in Knockvillar. Both the Businesses and the Artists committed to an openness and willingness for mutual observation, influencing one another over the duration of the programme.

The opportunity to explore, with honesty, the social perception of the artist, not as an isolated practitioner in a far off ivory tower, but as a co-worker, welcomed into the workplace as an equal, becomes more pertinent than ever, in periods of economic decline. The temporary co-workers do share common goals and traits including a passion to do the job right, with clear attention to detail along the way. These processes of common labour bode well for the social capital of the times in which we live; times where the goal of active citizenship may develop, with openness, and may receive the start-up resources it deserves, through transactions of trust.

<sup>(i)</sup> The Second Global Irish Economic Forum was held at Dublin Castle on 7-8 October 2011, as a follow on from the first Forum which took place at Farmleigh in 2009 and which was described as a situation where 'Irish business leaders came together to explore how the Irish at home and abroad, and those with a strong interest in Ireland, could work together and contribute to our economic recovery.' See <http://www.globalirishforum.ie/2011Programme.aspx> (Accessed: 28 Oct 11). Gabriel Byrne, Actor and Cultural Ambassador for Ireland participated in a Panel Debate titled '*Promoting Irish Culture: building on the progress since Farmleigh*' which can be viewed at <http://player.vimeo.com/video/30855265?title=0&byline=0&portrait=0> (Accessed: 28 Oct 11)

<sup>(ii)</sup> By way of a brief but by no means comprehensive example of the common vocabulary when you type the words 'collaboration' and 'creativity' into the Books section of the online bookstore Amazon, the number of titles that appear in the categories of 'Business and Investing' outnumber those in the area of 'Arts and Photography' by about 2:1. While it is a given that the business world is much larger than that of the sphere of the arts, a majority of titles using these key words stem from the area of business and management texts, illustrated in book titles such as '*The Culture of Collaboration: Maximizing Time, Talent and Tools to Create Value in the Global Economy*' (by Evan Rosen).

<sup>(iii)</sup> See the Business Dictionary.com at <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/collaboration.html> (Accessed: 27 Oct 11)

<sup>(iv)</sup> See the Create website at <http://www.create-ireland.ie/about/about-create.html> (Accessed: 27 Oct 11)