

Tír 2009 – 2012

A final report

“In a troubled world the idea of sending young artists to each other's countries for residencies is a brilliant one and the funders need to be thanked profusely. The exhibition TIR at MOMA WALES was very well received and the workshop for local primary schoolchildren was a highlight. We congratulate all those involved.”

Ruth Lambert, Treasurer, Y Tabernacl Trust



The ‘Tír’ visual arts residency and touring exhibition project will finally come to an end on 25th April 2012, when it closes at the Pan-Celtic Festival in Carlow, more than a year later than was originally envisaged. It’s a great pleasure to be able to report that it also exceeded all our expectations, both in its positive effects on the artists and galleries it has helped bring together, and also the communities who hosted it. The support we have received from a wide range of participants has been heartening, and in particular we would like to thank the project’s four main funders: the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, the Bank of Ireland, the Carnegie UK Trust and Voluntary Arts Wales.

The artists:

All six young professional artists who took part in the residences enjoyed the experience of living and working in a similar neighbouring native-language community, and all commented that it had led to positive developments in their work. I won’t go through a list of each of their responses, but quote here from three of them. Here is a comment from Sandra Kennedy from Lewis, who undertook her residency in Pen-Llŷn, North Wales:

Bha mi a’ coiseachd a h-uile latha timcheall Llanbedrog, suas air an rubha, agus air an tràigh, a’ dèanamh dealbhan le dathan-uisge, a’ cruinneachadh aitealan de bheatha an latha an-diugh agus na làithean a chaidh seachad, agus bha mi leughadh mun àite.

Bha an sgrùdadh mionaideach; chaidh mi air an aon chuairt iomadach turas, ach bha mothachadh ùr ann gach là. ‘S e ùine aonaranach a bha agam anns a’ Chuimrigh; fhuair mi eòlas air na craobhan, na creagan, na h-alltan, eadhan gnè na talmhainn.

I walked every day around Llandbedrog, over the headland, along the beach, making watercolour drawings, collecting glimpses of life now and life past, and reading material which related to the place. My study was detailed; I did the same walk many

times, though it was never the same experience. My time in Wales was one of solitude; I got to know the trees, the rocks and the streams, even the quality of the soil.

Ben Stammers from Bangor in North Wales lived and worked on the island of North Uist during his residency, and he too comments on the effect of the new environment on his developing practise:

Roedd bod ar Ogledd Uist yn teimlo fel bod ar drothwy drwy'r amser – ymyl patrwm o ddarnau diddiwedd o ddŵr a thir – datblygodd y gwaith i fod yn ymdrech i gyfleu'r teimlad yna o fod rhwng un ffurf a'r llall...

Being on North Uist felt like being constantly on a threshold – the edge of an endless fractal pattern of water and land – the work became about finding equivalents for that sense of being between one state and another...

Dan O Flaharta from Connemara also came to Pen-Llŷn, and he adapts a verse from W.B. Yeats to describe the pleasure he derived from his residency:

Caithfidh intleacht an duine rogha a dhéanamhsaol iomlán nó obair gan cháim Sa mBreatain Bheag, bhí an dá rud agam.

The intellect of man is forced to choose Perfection of life, or of the work, In Wales I had the two.



Catrin Williams, Tess Urbanska and Ben Stammers at Tír opening in Machynlleth, Jan 2012

Both Sandra Kennedy and Tess Urbanska from Pen-Llŷn, at least, found their professional practice and economic security enhanced through participation in Tír. Both sold a significant amount of their exhibited work (as did Ben Stammers and Catrin Williams) while Sandra has been invited to mount a one-woman exhibition in mid-Wales and Tess has returned on two occasions to work in Ireland as well as finding her work in demand from larger and more prestigious galleries across Wales.

The galleries:

It was only at the culmination of the residency period that the decision was made to curate and exhibit the work internationally, so outstanding did the galleries involved feel it to be. In the end, the exhibition travelled for over eighteen months through three countries and four jurisdictions, showing both in remote, rural areas and major cities including Derry, Glasgow and Galway. Creative work by young artists living and working through their native languages, and the context of that work, thus reached a range of audiences throughout Ireland and the UK. Here is the touring programme:

Oriel Plas Glyn-y-Weddw, Gwynedd *	Nov - Jan 2010
Celtic Connections Festival, Glasgow	Jan - Feb 2011
Taigh Chearsabhagh, North Uist *	Feb – March 2011
Sabhail Mor Ostaig, Isle of Skye	March - May 2011
Galway City Hall/ Aras Eanna, Aran Islands *	July – Sept 2011
Void Gallery, Derry	Oct - Nov 2011
MoMA Cymru, Machynlleth, Powys	Jan –March 2012
Pan-Celtic Festival, Carlow	March - April 2012

The three original host galleries are denoted by an asterisk

During each exhibition period, a programme of activities was mounted by the host venue, often including an opening, schools and art club workshops, and the development of cross-cultural interactions, especially involving primary schools. All three host galleries have, during the period of this initiative, developed closer ties with each other and with the Celtic Neighbours organisation, and the directors of all three have become active members of the Celtic Neighbours committee. Other centres involved, including Sàbhal Mór Ostaig and MoMA Cymru, have joined with them to develop future collaborations including a planned conference in Skye in 2013 and a travelling exhibition on the cultural life of small island communities. Several of these centres have also hosted other cross-border Celtic-language events since becoming involved in Tír, and now participate in an on-line discussion group and communication site.

The wider community:

Openings and the exhibition process itself played a vital part in bringing both the work, and the concerns and aspirations implicit in the process, to a wider audience. The balance of venues involved allowed us to address both audiences in the Celtic-language heartlands, and those in major cities. Firstly, here are the comments of Mairéad ni Gallachoir, Director of Aras Eanna on Inis Óírr in the Aran Islands, who also organised Tír's exhibition in Galway City Centre:

“We decided that we would split the exhibition in two, one half at our Arts Centre in Inis Óírr and the other half in our nearest city, Galway. The Town Hall Theatre in Galway had 5,000 attendees that month, as our exhibition was showing there during the Galway Arts Festival 2011. We wanted to split the exhibition so that tourists in Galway would be encouraged to visit the other half of the exhibition on the island and vice versa.

Most of our partners and artists decided to attend the Inis Oírr Island launch, so there was more fun and more freedom on that occasion. It also meant that we could have formal and informal meetings on the island during the weekend. The launch on the island was the more informal one, even though we invited Dinny McGinley, the Minister of State for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, to open the exhibition in Áras Éanna for us. We had lots of people at the island launch, locals and tourists. It was a lovely evening, which meant that some people could stand outside and enjoy the local seafood with a glass of wine. We had local musicians playing harp, whistle, flute, box and guitar. The two artists at our exhibition were Dan O Flatharta from Connemara and Tess Urbanska and her family from Wales. A group from Friesland came for the weekend and really enjoyed the experience. We also had Darach Ó Tuairisc from the drama company Fíbín, Gwyn Jones from Oriel Plas Glyn y Weddw, Meic Llewellyn from Celtic Neighbours and Muireann ni Dhraenoghain from Ealann na Gaeltachta in attendance, so there was a great deal of discussion and networking throughout the weekend. Tess Urbanska stayed on for the week and did a painting workshop for students at Áras Éanna. The young students really enjoyed this experience and we still have their work on show here.”



Tír at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, April 2011

Kathleen ni Leoid, of Sábhal Mór Ostaig on Skye, was similarly aware of the influence Tir had exercised both on the degree and FE students at the college there, and the wider community, reinforcing cultural confidence and a sense of identity while, at the same time opening perspectives to developments in other cultures. Kathleen here focusses on the exhibition period as a whole:

“Bha e na thoileachas is na thogail-inntinn dhuinn an taisbeanadh soirbheachail “TiR” a chumail an seo ann an Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, Ionad Nàiseanta na Gàidhlig. Am measg na bha san èisteachd agus ag amharc bha oileanaich is luchd-obrach na colaiste, coimhearsnachdan an Eilein Sgitheanaich is Loch Aillse agus luchd-tadhail o air feadh an t-saoghail. Tha e mar phrìomh amas dhan ionad seo a bhith ri leasachadh agus comharrachadh cànan, cultar agus ealain na Gàidhlig agus, a thoradh air sin, a’ cruthachadh cheanglaichean le buidhnean mion-chànanach eile.

Tro obair leasachaidh nan ealan ann an Sabhal Mòr Ostaig tha sinn a’ feuchainn ri ùidh a thogail anns na h-ealain làirsinneach, is mar a tha iad nam meadhan air cultar na Gàidhlig a chur an cèill.

Bha “Tír” na dheagh eisimpleir air obair anns an deach luchd-ealain aig a bheil Gàidhlig na h-Alba, Gàidhlig na h-Èireann agus Cuimris an sàs còmhla, agus a thug cothrom malairt bheachdan dhaibh fhèin agus dhan fheadhainn a bhios ag amharc air an obair aca. Tha am pròiseact adhartach, lèirsinneach seo fhèin na dheagh eisimpleir de cho-obrachadh thar chrìochan. Tha sinn air dàimh a stèidheachadh a leigeas dhuinn fhìn is dhar nàbannan Ceilteach an tuilleadh obrach a thoirt a-mach còmhla.”

“The hosting of the exhibition “Tír” at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig was a great pleasure and success. The audience here at Scotland’s national centre for Gaelic included students, staff and the community of Skye and Lochalsh as well as visitors from all over the world. Our main aim here is the development and celebration of the Gaelic language, culture and arts, and in doing this, forge links with users of other lesser used languages.

Through our art development here at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig we are trying to increase awareness of the importance of visual art in expressing Gaelic culture and “Tír” was an excellent example of working with artists who are speakers of Gaelic, Gaelige and Welsh, giving them and their audiences the opportunity to exchange and share ideas. This outward-looking and ambitious international project is an excellent example of how to work across borders. Through it we have developed links for further collaborations with our Celtic neighbours and beyond!”

Anita Schwarz, class teacher at Ysgol Gynradd Machynlleth, after a multi-art-form workshop arranged as part of Tir’s residency there in February 2012, which included music, painting, dance and drama, singles out the role of inspiration in enriching the children’s experience, and the importance of collective creative and performance work in stimulating and reflecting their responses:



“Cafodd blant Blwyddyn 5 a 6 o Ysgol Gynradd Machynlleth amser arbennig o dda yn cymryd rhan yn y diwrnod celfyddydau i gefnogi'r prosiect 'Tir'. Mwynhauodd y plant cwrdd â Sian James (telyn), Tess Urbanska (artist gweledol) a Dwynwen Lloyd Evans (drama) a dysgu am eu gwaith drwy weithdai cyffrous a diddorol. Diolch yn fawr iawn i bawb am ddiwrnod ysbrydoledig! Meddai Gwenno, Blwyddyn 5, wedyn 'Fy hoff ddarn i oedd y berfformiad olaf oherwydd roedd yn hwyl yn perfformio yn y Tabernacl.' “

“Children from years 5 and 6 at Machynlleth Primary School had an excellent time taking part in a full day of arts activities, supported by

the Tír project. They all enjoyed meeting the artists Siàn James (harpist), Tess Urbanska (painter) and Dwynwen Lloyd Evans (dramatist) and learning about their work through welcoming and interesting hands-on sessions. A big thank you to everyone for such an inspiring day. Gwenno, from Year 5, commented 'My favourite part was the final performance, because it's such an experience to perform in Y Tabernacl.'"

Conclusions

This was an unusual and remarkable project, in that it filled three full years rather than the few months originally envisaged, and as well as achieving the outcomes spelt out during the planning process ("building confidence among the young artists involved, and more widely amongst those working within these often isolated and marginalised cultures through shared perceptions and skill-sharing,") it has proved highly effective in developing active, horizontal, links between a range of galleries, arts centres and other organisations in these 'peripheral' areas, a number of which are already working together to develop further interactions. It has also enthused students from primary-school to university age, and offered an inspiring example of what young people who choose to work within their native cultures can achieve. A number of participating schools have also begun to develop joint projects. Tír's continuing impact on the societies that have hosted it and participated in its progress and development has therefore been far greater than we could ever have envisaged.

In any report such as this, it's only right and proper to describe the frustrations and failures as well as the triumphs and achievements. This project has, however, developed with great smoothness and any difficulties associated with it have been incidental and short-lived. That it grew into so much more than was originally envisaged, and lasted so much longer, inevitably created challenges in terms of finding support time and raising extra funds; but so well have we been supported, and so effective has Tír been in catching the imagination of venues and audiences alike, that rather than becoming an obstacle, this process has drawn in new stakeholders and additional resources throughout its development. We at Celtic Neighbours have certainly been beneficiaries of Tír's success, as our core work of expanding and sustaining an active cultural network across the Celtic world has been enhanced throughout.

Heartfelt thanks, once again, to all our friends, supporters and stakeholders who contributed in so many ways to the initiative's success. The three original host galleries – Aras Eanna in County Galway, Taigh Chearsabhaigh in North Uist, and above all Oriel Plas Glyn y Weddw in Gwynedd, have been sources of expertise and creative ideas, and generous and sustained support, from the first minute of this initiative till the last.

Music, drama and dance session – and time to reflect on the art itself - involving Ysgol Gynradd Machynlleth and Ysgol Gynradd Glantwymyn, February 2012



Meic Llewellyn, Celtic Neighbours Co-ordinator, March 31st 2012.