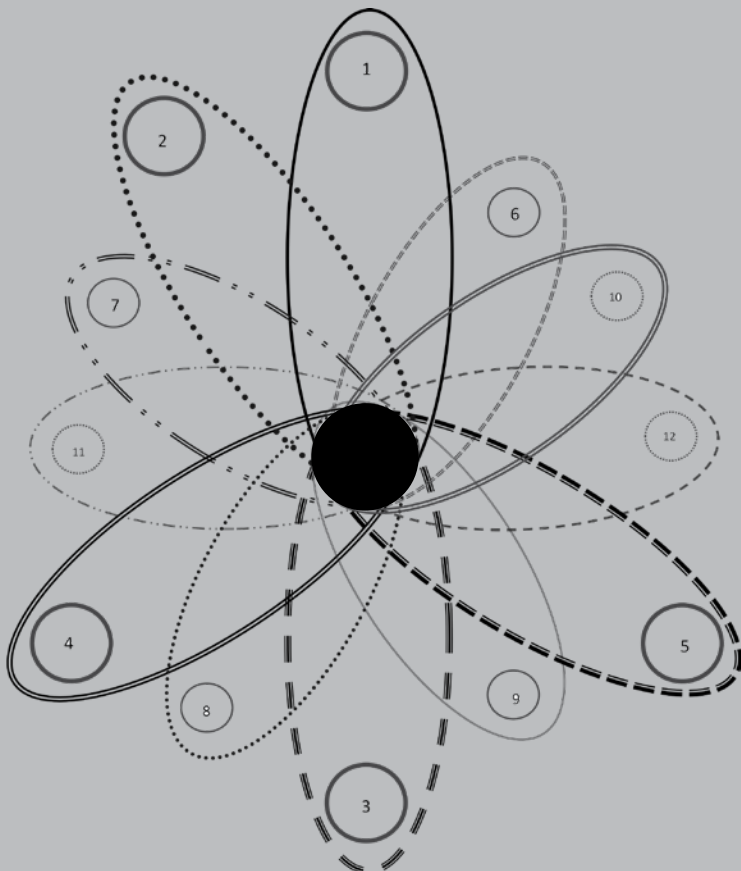


# A CASE STUDY: COLLABORATIVE COMMISSIONING FOR PUBLIC ART EXPLORING THE THEMES OF CLIMATE CHANGE AND BIODIVERSITY

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## AN URGENT ENQUIRY

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**An Urgent Enquiry** was a public art programme and commissioning partnership developed by Dublin City Council, Fingal County Council and Wexford County Council supported by the Arts Council of Ireland's An Invitation to Collaboration Scheme

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## INTRODUCTION

In 2017, three project partners — Dublin City Council, Fingal County Council and Wexford County Council Arts Offices — developed a public art programme titled *An Urgent Enquiry*. Initial funding through the Arts Council's An Invitation to Collaboration Scheme, Phase 1 in 2017–2018 enabled us to explore how Public Art commissioning processes could be developed through peer support, practice-based research and a collaborative approach. The award gave us the time necessary to explore and gather together our collective expertise and reflect deeply on the role of Public Art in relation to biodiversity and climate change. This in turn made it possible for us, over the course of four years, and with additional funding through the Arts Council's An Invitation to Collaboration Scheme, Phase 2, to host a series of three Think Tank Sessions and three Artist Residencies that led to multiple public outcomes in each of the local authorities. Importantly, the project in its final phase has also enabled us to now outline the steps we took to ensure commissioning integrity throughout each phase of the project.

With this text we aim to make explicit our best practice approaches and thinking while presenting *An Urgent Enquiry* as a case study for commissioning Public Art. We recount the collective and collaborative experiences within the project partnership, which from the beginning intentionally included a range of stakeholders from arts, science, biodiversity, community, planning and activist platforms. We outline the ways in which we engaged local, national and international connections as a means to address the salient themes of biodiversity and

Artist Fiona McDonald and Shane Regan,  
Eco-hydrologist (NPWS), Dublin Residency.

climate change, and their particular context to commissioning artists within a Public Art capacity.

Importantly, these key issues are being addressed by all local authorities in Ireland through the Climate Action Regional Offices (CAROs) as well as each local authority's Climate Adaptations Plan. We feel it is also significant to note that biodiversity and climate change represent two of the nine planetary boundaries<sup>1</sup> within which humanity can continue to develop and thrive for generations to come, and therefore recognise that *An Urgent Enquiry* contributes to a wider international conversation centred on Public Arts Programming. It is our hope that this text developed by the three project partners may act as a guide, and in the following pages offer our own experience as commissioners.<sup>2</sup>

*Special Area of ConVersion*, 2019 by Mary Conroy and Joanna Hopkins, performance on Burrow Beach, Portrane, Co. Dublin

1. "The Nine Planetary Boundaries" as presented by the Stockholm Resilience Centre 2020. Stockholmresilience.Org. <https://www.stockholmresilience.org/research/planetary-boundaries/planetary-boundaries/about-the-research/the-nine-planetary-boundaries.html>.

2. For more information see: [www.anurgentenquiry.ie](http://www.anurgentenquiry.ie). The website includes reports on the three Think Tanks, Artist's Brief, reports of the Artists' Commissions in the three local authorities, and final Evaluation Report by Dr Eileen Hutton.

## GERMINATION



## Walking the Ground

We feel that Public Art as realised through local authorities has always relied on and required many levels of collaboration, across departments and communities. It is also a remarkable way of presenting art to the public outside of formal arts venues. It can create encounters with art in unexpected places and circumstances and, in turn, offer members of the public an opportunity to engage with artists and ideas.

When we began our conversations in 2017, all three local authorities had an interest in the areas of art, biodiversity, and in particular the impact of climate change along our eastern coast-lines. Because of this, we decided to gather our collective expertise and explore new ways of commissioning Public Art. At the time, we were also acutely aware of the increasing visibility of art and artists who were situating their practice at the intersection of art, ecology and climate activism.

## Cultivating a Methodology

Identifying this rationale provided an essential framework and we began to answer the simple but all important questions of “who, what, where, why?” We then carried out a thematic overview of the overlapping areas of shared goals, responsibilities, policies and local development plans that other organisations already had in place. We collated information from groups such as Climate Action Regional Office (CARO), Teagasc, National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) and Clean Coasts, etc. We found equally valuable the inputs from local community leaders, action groups, Tidy Towns, citizen scientists and schools.

The collectively explored themes which emerged through this research phase were nuanced in the areas of social, political and cultural attitudes. They were as follows: our shared coastline, climate change, disturbance, the balance between nature

and human activity, human awareness, understanding of place, interconnectedness, biodiversity and the unpredictability of the future in this regard, our unique flora and fauna, and habitat loss and fragmentation. By identifying these themes, we were then able to formulate our initial research question: “In what ways may Public Art commissioning facilitate long-lasting and meaningful relationships between artistic practice and scientific research?”

This articulation led us to distil the stated objectives for *An Urgent Enquiry*. They were as follows:

- To provide forums where those concerned with arts and biodiversity can meet to discuss issues and exchange ideas relating to this important matter of worldwide concern.
- To consider the urgent issues of biodiversity, climate change and the impacts of human activity on nature and nature on humans.
- To engage with and interact with the public.
- To support artists to collaborate meaningfully with biodiversity experts and to connect with local communities.

Throughout this divergent phase of research, we found it useful to maintain a creative curiosity. This ensured that our methodology was both reflective and responsive to the project as it developed. Also at the core of the overall process was an ethos of mutual respect, of true partnership, where different skills and assets of partners were equally valued. Our approach to practice-based research developed as a process of active listening, networking, connecting, sitting-in, walking and reflecting which ultimately led us to identify our nearest national advocates, build meaningful partnerships and gather our essential team members.

## Identifying the Core Working Group

From the outset, we identified a Core Working Group and then, as needed, incorporated additional specialists, specifically during the Residency Phase, that represented a subgroup within the overall team. The Core Working Group consisted namely of the three project partners: Liz Burns, Arts Officer, Wexford County Council; Caroline Cowley, Public Art Coordinator for Fingal County Council; and Ruairí Ó Cuív, Dublin City Council's Public Art Officer; as well as the Biodiversity and Environmental Awareness Officers from each local authority. These included Hans Visser, Shane Cassey, Lorraine Bull, and Niamh Lennon. The three project partners devised the commissioning strategy for art and biodiversity, implementation and development for the project, provided support for the artists and ensured its successful delivery across all partners. The Biodiversity and Environmental Awareness Officers wrote the context for each area in the Artists' brief and were essential community links within each residency. Project Manager Denise Reddy also occupied a pivotal role within the Core Working Group and acted as a necessary and creative link between the stakeholders, commissioners, artists and wider public. We were intent that the Core Working Group should include a range of relevant local authority and commissioner expertise along with select external specialists that represented arts, heritage, biodiversity, environment, climate adaptation and climate action.

## Subgroups and Specialists

When considering how to map, record, review and manage the project over the course of the four years, we identified a subgroup of specialists and specially procured roles, using the funding allowed us through the Arts Council's An Invitation to Collaboration Scheme. These were:

The Researcher/Evaluator commissioned for this project (Phase

1 & 2) who wrote a series of reports on the initial Think Tank sessions and provided a written evaluation of the project outcomes. Overall, the evaluation aimed to record and review any learning from the commissioning experience, including from key stakeholders, partners and artists.

We also enlisted a Website Developer who developed and maintained the *An Urgent Enquiry* website as a public platform that reached both local and international audiences, presented the project as a whole, and continues to feature informative online profiles for each county, residency and artist.

We hired a Project Photographer who documented the Think Tank sessions, Artist Residencies, and multiple public outcomes through a series of audio recordings, still and film footage. This helped to document the overall commissioning process as it developed, and fed into the final evaluations as part of the review, decisions, outcomes and feedback from the project.

We procured an overall Project Manager/Curator to coordinate Phase 2 of an *An Urgent Enquiry* who had particular expertise in public art commissioning in the area of biodiversity. This expertise provided an invaluable support to the artists and the overall team.

Another integral subgroup developed during the Residency Phase, and each artist engaged with Biodiversity Officers, Environmental Awareness Officers, National Parks and Wildlife Services staff, community volunteer groups involved in environmental conservation, preservation or education initiatives, other scientists, and professionals within historical, academic, and educational institutions.

Other members of this team that proved essential varied according to the research undertaken, and included other artists, musicians, cultural producers or professionals with technical skills, local knowledge, or research experience. All undoubtedly helped to situate the work within the wider context.





*The Unavoidable Interconnectedness of Everything,*  
public workshop by artists Mark Clare and Mairead  
Stafford in Johnstown Castle, Wexford, 2019

## Think Tanks – Bringing Together and Thinking Together

From the early stages of *An Urgent Enquiry* a Think Tank model was adopted. This involved each local authority planning an intensive day of talks, presentations and site visits relevant to their local area with invited local, national and international specialists, across art, science, ecology and other fields. This Think Tank model allowed the commissioning partners an opportunity to listen, exchange and begin to understand each other's roles and responsibilities within the specific themes of climate change and biodiversity. We felt that the Think Tank model offered scope to invite the views of individuals or groups – locally, nationally and internationally – who are engaged in current research relating to the subject matter of the commissions. In line with the ethos of the project, we also felt that this initial phase represented a strategic framework for implementing practice-based research while providing a platform to build a shared respect and deeper understanding of diverse fields and disciplines.

**Fingal County** The Fingal Think Tank Session on the 26th of January 2018 began with a shore visit to the Portrane Peninsula. Biodiversity Officer Hans Visser and local citizen, Raymond Brett, from the Coastal Liaison Group, spoke about their individual and often conflicting experiences of dealing with the coastal erosion of the dunes along the coastline of County Fingal, in particular the neighbourhood of the Burrow. Hans Visser contextualised the site visit by explaining that the 55-kilometre-long coastline of Fingal comprises estuaries, dunes and beaches, and is a natural amenity and resource for the people in the county. Importantly, he noted that the most protected sites found along the coastline are home to the most protected species. The extensive dune system in a healthy and robust state is also an important natural protection zone between the sea and the hinterland. However, over the past

decade, the coastline has become severely affected by dune erosion, pedestrian access, housing development and patches of sea buckthorn. Most immediately affected by the long-standing issues of coastal erosion in County Fingal are the residents of Portrane, and specifically The Burrow, and opinions diverge as to what extent restoration is feasible, fiscally responsible, environmentally advisable, and even sustainable.

Following the site visit, a series of presentations were made in the offices of Balleally Landfill. Alice Sharp, founder of Invisible Dust in the UK<sup>3</sup>, presented a select number of artists commissions, large scale events, education and community activities that have been developed through the organisation as a way to raise awareness of environmental concerns and connect with people on a personal level through making the invisible visible. Irish artist Siobhán McDonald's presentation focused on the central tenets of her practice as well as her collaborations with scientists, botanists, geologists and the European Space Agency. Dr. Ruth Brennan, a marine social scientist, presented her collaborative practice with Glasgow-based visual artist Stephen Hurrell and discussed three individual projects that developed over the course of four years.

The Think Tank group then visited *The Hide Project*, a Public Artwork that was developed by Garrett Phelan in association with Fingal County Council in 2016 and influenced by the Balleally Landfill site. *The Hide Project* is in part a large-scale sculptural installation which acts as a service to the community in the form of a fully functioning bird hide along the Rogerstown Estuary. Within *The Hide Project*, Suzanne Walsh performed a text-based work

3. [InvisibleDust.com](http://InvisibleDust.com). The mission of *Invisible Dust* is to encourage awareness of, and meaningful responses to, climate change and environmental issues. They achieve this by facilitating a dialogue between leading visual artists, creative technologists and scientists.



Fingal Think Tank with Hans Visser, Biodiversity Officer - Fingal County Council, Burrow Beach, Portrane, Co. Dublin, 2018.

Artist Fiona McDonald from Dublin Residency.





entitled *Lazarus Lingua* during which she read aloud, in Latin, the names of extinct species of animals and plants. The final outing facilitated direct experiences of contemporary artistic practice and stimulated further discussion of the potential offered by art and science collaborations, public engagement and participation.

**Wexford County** The Wexford Think Tank Session on the 22nd of March 2018 began with a tour of The Raven Wood Reserve given by National Parks and Wildlife Ranger Dominic Berridge. Acting as a wilderness docent of sorts, he contextualised the site visit by describing the extensive and diverse coastline of Wexford. He explained how this wide range of coastal habitats, such as lagoons, dune systems, lakes and reefs, are of both international and national conservation interest. Importantly, he also noted that these terrestrial, freshwater, coastal and marine habitats support a diverse range of native species and that Wexford is regarded as an internationally important stronghold for breeding seabird colonies as well as breeding wildfowl.

After the walk through the trails of Raven Point, the Think Tank group left for the Wexford Wildfowl Reserve, which is jointly owned by BirdWatch Ireland and NPWS and is situated in 936 hectares of reclaimed sloblands. It is also a designated Ramsar Site, part of a Special Protection Area (SPA), a proposed National Heritage Area (pNHA), as well as a National Nature Reserve. It is considered one of Ireland's finest bird sites and is an internationally important wetland. Habitats within this area include wet grassland and tillage, a brackish-water drainage channel, and reedbeds and pools have been purposefully created to attract passage waders and wildfowl.

John Kinsella, Wexford Wildfowl Reserve staff, brought the group into the observation tower located on site, noting the diversity and density of birdlife as we gazed over the wetlands. Following this, a series of presentations were made inside the connecting

interpretation centre, amongst scientific illustrations, preserved specimens of birds and eggs, dioramas of ecosystems and interactive educational games.

Anna Macleod presented first, discussing select projects from her ongoing body of work entitled *Water Conversations* which has led to working partnerships with artists, scientists, cultural geographers, activists, engineers and local historians. Irish artist Méadhbh O'Connor presented multiple works from her practice and UCD College of Science Artist inResidency, which range from large-scale spatial installations to ephemeral, biological or temporal works frequently underpinned by earth science and environmental concerns. Karen Dubsky, a German-Irish marine ecologist associated with Trinity College Dublin and Coastwatch Europe, introduced CWE as an international network of environmental groups, universities and other educational institutions who collectively work to protect wetlands by raising public awareness of their value and demonstrating practical ways to save them. Finally, Chris Fremantle, a Senior Research Fellow and Lecturer at Gray's School of Art, Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen and Producer of Public Art projects with healthcare, art and ecology themes presented. In his presentation entitled *An Urgent Enquiry: What do Artists Do?*, Chris discussed several eco-arts practices as well as providing a clear and concise overview of how arts could make accessible dimensions of climate change transformation processes to a wider public. Located directly within a Special Protection Area and Interpretation Centre, the Think Tank session presented first-hand encounters of practical applications and strategies for public engagement with the natural world, as well as a synthesis of collaborative and socially engaged artistic methodologies in relation to biodiversity and climate change.



Site visit Ballyteigue Burrow Nature Reserve with artist Mark Clare, Dominic Berridge, Ranger (National Parks & Wildlife Service) and Niamh Lennon (Wexford Biodiversity Officer). Wexford Think Tank 2018.

Wexford Think Tank 2018.



**Dublin City** The Dublin City Think Tank Session on the 27th of April 2018 began with a presentation by Pat Corrigan, island supervisor from Dublin City Council, at the Interpretative Centre of North Bull Island Biosphere Reserve. The Interpretative Centre itself was part lecture theatre, part natural history museum, part aquarium and was entirely located in an observation tower-like building complete with a telescope for viewing wildlife. Corrigan explained that the island itself is protected as a nature reserve under EU protocols and as a UNESCO biosphere reserve. North Bull Island is also a Wildfowl Sanctuary, a Ramsar Convention site, a Biogenetic Reserve, and a Special Area Amenity Order site. He noted that biosphere reserves differ from the traditional conservation model because they attempt to marry the protection of biodiversity with a range of human activities on the protected site. Corrigan noted that North Bull Island is the only UNESCO Biosphere worldwide which includes within its area a national capital city and therefore, its impact on society is higher than for just the immediate resident population.

This presentation was followed by a short walk down to Dollymount Strand, from where the group could see the chimneys of the former Poolbeg Generating Station just visible in the distance. He explained the island faces complex challenges due to increased intensification of recreational pressures, the unleashing of dogs, an increasing frequency of intensive storms, plastic waste streams, increasing sewage treatment capacity, and the introduction of the invasive flora sea berry. Despite these ongoing issues, Corrigan maintained that the North Bull Island Biosphere Reserve continues to thrive; noting 'It is a classic example of a paradox of conservation: a number of the most significant sites remaining for wild creatures are the direct outcomes of human activity.'

From the Bull Island Biosphere Reserve, the Think Tank group went to The Red Stables, established in 2006 by Dublin City

Council as a dedicated space for visual artists and the creation of contemporary art with the additional aim of promoting public enjoyment and appreciation of the arts located within St. Anne's Park. The series of presentations and discussions were initiated by visual artist and maker Rosie O'Reilly, who discussed the work she created during her three-month artist residency at CIIMAR, an interdisciplinary marine research institution in Portugal. Her research explored how humans understand change, borders and movement in a time dominated by the Anthropocene, climate change and big data. Niamh Ní Cholmáin, Dublin City's Biodiversity Facilitator for Community Engagement, next discussed her role and explained the importance of biospheres for developing community connection to place, engagement with and protection of the natural world. In his presentation entitled *How the Arts Can Reach What Economists Can't*, Mark Wallace, director of Beaford Arts, gave a brief overview of the North Devon UNESCO Biosphere Reserve in his capacity as vice-chair. He introduced Beaford Arts and discussed a select number of the past projects the organisation has helped to facilitate over the past decade. Finally, Irish artist Yvanna Greene's presentation took the form of a performative lecture. In a work of speculative fiction, she presented iridescent, polymer-based sculptural forms as citizen scientist discoveries. Located both within a Biosphere Reserve and dedicated contemporary arts space, the Think Tank Session reaffirmed the significance of progressive conversation models that integrate human and ecosystems ecologies and lent significant insight into the methodologies of practitioners working at the intersection of artistic practice, biodiversity and climate change.

Dublin Think Tank and site visit to Bull Island.





## GROWTH

### Significant Learning from the Think Tank Sessions

The Think Tank Sessions contributed greatly to the development of the Public Art Residencies in that they identified key areas of biological significance, special areas of conservation, and the places that exist at the confluence of community life, recreation, and natural heritage. The field trips and overviews of each of the local authorities led by Biodiversity Officers and/or NPWS representatives in the corresponding local authority were essential in facilitating direct encounters with the Special Protection Areas. The presenters lent great insight into the methodologies of art and science collaborations, especially as they were able to detail their research process, provide their perspectives on these relationships and to offer recommendations based on their experiences. It was also a useful platform for those not within the arts field, such as scientists, Biodiversity Officers or Environmental Awareness Officers, who may not have already been familiar, to see the potential value in fostering such relationships and to simultaneously introduce the professional standards of artistic practice and research. Additionally, the Think Tank Sessions were an essential phase of developing this thematically-driven Public Art strand as they identified the key contributors who continued to engage with the project and key biodiversity, ecological and climate concerns within each county.

The sessions were also key in illustrating the potential for substantial arts contributions within these given areas, and provided clarification that future programming for commissioning Public Art in relation to biodiversity and climate change would be significantly enhanced by an embedded Artist in Residence scheme. With additional funding under the The Art Council's An Invitation to Collaboration Scheme, namely the Project Implementation Phase, three Artists' Residencies, one for each of the local authorities associated with *An Urgent Enquiry*, were announced and implemented.

*The Unavoidable Interconnectedness of Everything*,  
public workshop by artists Mark Clare & Mairead  
Stafford in Johnstown Castle, Wexford, 2019.

## Our Selection Process

The procurement process for *An Urgent Enquiry* was delivered in line with best practice, which included the Public Art: Per Cent for Art Scheme General National Guidelines published by the Irish Government in 2004. These define three selection processes utilised in public art commissioning. These are: open competition, limited / invited competition and direct commissioning. As curators we decided that, while invited competition has its advantages in that it is more likely to attract artists with established careers who might not otherwise apply for a commission in an open call situation, the particular context of *An Urgent Enquiry* warranted an open competition. Key to this decision was that, while there were a limited number of artists working in art, biodiversity and climate change, the subject was so important and “urgent” that it behoved us to seek interest both nationally and internationally. Equally important to us in choosing an open competition was the knowledge that although we were totally open about the approach which artists might propose, the subject of the commission, the nature of the residency, and preferred artform (visual arts) were limiting factors in themselves.

## Artist's Brief

As commissioners we believe that most important document in Public Art commissioning is the Artist's Brief. This is because the tone and the way a brief is written has enormous impact on the nature and direction of the commissioning process. We structured our document so that it gave an introduction to the context for the commission and included more general information which outlined the process and procedure for submitting and assessing proposals. We also included reference to the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and Freedom of Information Act.

We were conscious of providing a brief that was open to the extent that it simultaneously allowed artists to respond to the commissioning context, left space for artistic originality and insights, and yet was clear with regard to any pertinent restrictions or issues. Above all, we trusted that artists would undertake their own research, spend time thinking and imagining, and so did not place too much emphasis on any one aspect of the commission context as we felt this might be unintentionally directional or result in unimaginative submissions.

## Criteria

Within the Artist's Brief we listed the criteria for selection as follows:

- Quality and artistic ambition

- Cultural and environmental value and impact – where relevant to the context

- Feasibility of the project – including technical and financial feasibility

- Track record (or potential) of the artist/s

## Context

As we outlined the context for the commission we did so with awareness that information provided not only had the capacity to prompt ideas from the artists but would also encourage deep engagement with the project's themes of biodiversity and climate change. We were explicit in conveying our decisions for identifying these themes and their relevance to and resonance with each local authority.

## Place

In advance of the call for proposals, the Biodiversity Officers prepared a local profile for each of the residency locations; one for the Wexford Coastline, one for Portrane and Rush Resorts in Co. Fingal, and one for North Bull Island and Dublin Bay in Dublin City. The profile detailed the importance of each of the identified areas and provided a necessary foundation for the artistic research to be undertaken during the residency period. As such, each residency was located within or adjacent to areas that exist at the confluence of biological significance, ecological importance, community life, recreation and natural heritage. We felt that researching and making work within these explicitly entangled places of significance would enable both artists and audiences to expand their understanding of the complex, interconnected experiences of life on Earth.

## Selection Panels & Briefing

We ensured that the commission selection panel was a manageable size and had a balance of inputs with the majority of expertise coming from the arts, in line with the National Guidelines on Public Art<sup>4</sup>. The Selection Panel consisted of members of the Core Working Group that had guided the development of the commission as well as external art experts. A wide range of competitive applications were submitted through an open call. We shortlisted and interviewed a select group of artists in consultation with our Biodiversity Officers and then appointed the residencies based on the shortlisted group.

4. Public Art: Per Cent for Art Scheme General National Guidelines: page 29

## Artist Residency Model

Following this process, Wexford County Council, Fingal County Council and Dublin City Council were delighted to announce the selected artists for the *An Urgent Enquiry* residency programme in 2019. These significant residencies were awarded to Mark Clare, Mary Conroy & Joanna Hopkins, and Fiona McDonald. The residencies offered each artist the opportunity to reside for three months in the local authority area to explore the biodiversity of each location and the effects of climate change. These research residencies involved interactions with local biodiversity and environmental specialists, scientists, local experts relating to the artists' interests, and engagement with local communities, with ongoing support from the local authority Arts and Biodiversity Offices. It is important to note that each residency location was chosen for its biological significance and ecological importance in the respective county.

When considering the scope for developing this cross-disciplinary partnership, we felt that time was one of the most valuable assets we could offer. From past experience, we know that time supports artists to think, respond and engage, and to create work that has a meaningful impact on the public. Above all, the resource of time can strengthen the research, relationships and understanding that an artist can build in a place or context, which, in turn, can greatly enhance the Public Art outcomes. As such, it is important to note that while the site specific aspect of the residency took place over three months, the incubation period for each was over a year and included a preliminary research phase. The artists, deeply committed to their research, continued to reflect and develop their respective bodies of work and public outcomes which were presented from late 2019 until early 2020.

## ECOSYSTEM



### MISSING

*Osmia aurulenta* (Gold-Fringed Mason Bee)

- Medium sized solitary species (7-12mm).
- Females have ginger hairs on the thorax and ginger/red hair bands on the abdomen, which are most obvious towards the tip. The bottom of the abdomen is rounded, giving the bee a chunky appearance.
- It emerges in spring and can be seen from April – August.
- Restricted to sand dunes and only occurs down the east and south-east coast.
- Nests only in empty snail shells.

SOLITARY BEES pollinate more flowers than any other group of insects including butterflies and birds, ensuring that plant communities are healthy and productive. Without them mammals and birds would not have the seeds, berries, or plants on which they depend.

PLEASE DO NOT DISTURB BEES OR REMOVE SHELLS

[www.anurgentenquiry.ie](http://www.anurgentenquiry.ie)

## Connections

From the outset of the Residencies, conversations, connections and meetings were facilitated between artists and Biodiversity Officers, Environmental Awareness Officers, NPWS representatives and CARO officers by the Arts Officer, Public Arts Officer and Public Art Coordinator, and the Project Manager/Curator. Where possible, introductions to other scientists relevant to the areas of research were also organised. Artists met with members of historical, academic, and educational institutions including the Natural History Museum, the National Botanic Gardens, The Royal Irish Academy, Trinity College Dublin, National University of Ireland, Maynooth, University College Dublin and Burren College of Art. Artists also engaged with groups such as Portrane Little Tern Conservation Project, the Fingal Branch of Birdwatch Ireland, the Irish Whale and Dolphin Monitoring Group, The Living Bog, Coastwatch Ireland, and Newbridge House. The web of connections generated through the facilitated meetings with these individuals and groups contributed varying degrees of significance to each of the artists and was seen as an essential component of supporting the *An Urgent Enquiry* artists in residence.

## Community Engagement

Artists were made aware of known community volunteer groups within each local area that were involved in environmental conservation, preservation, or education initiatives. In many cases the artists themselves made the initial introductions, which helped to foster lasting and beneficial relationships. As a means for establishing the artist in Residence and the residency itself as a vital contribution to the local community it was useful to link any public outcomes, workshops or exhibitions with other local festivals or programming. The Fingal and Wexford public outcomes were linked with the *Bleeding Pig Festival* and the *Johnstown Honeybee*

*Missing* by Mark Clare. Public Art Poster installation along 14 Wexford beaches (June – Dec 2019).



*Feast-ival* respectively. This helped to engage a wider public that might not be seen as the typical “white cube space” audience in conversations and active participation regarding arts and biodiversity. Community engagement should be embedded from the start of the commissioning process as this is how meaningful impacts and outcomes will be achieved. Communities of interest and place were of vital importance throughout the four-year process of *An Urgent Enquiry*. Communities of interest included scientists, artists, local authority staff (Heritage, Biodiversity and Environment), as well as invited international speakers who were involved from the Think Tanks though to the commissions. Communities of place became particularly relevant during the commissioning phase of the project.

### **Public Outcomes**

**Wexford** Mark Clare’s residency in County Wexford was both research and community based, and unfolded through a collaboratively developed series of free workshops for the general public, a public art intervention along 14 Wexford beaches, as well as two video works completed after his residency. The residency itself was underpinned by an interdisciplinary practice that investigated the local marine habitats of Wexford County, the implications of habitat loss and fragmentation, and the impact of human behaviour on biodiversity. Themes of life, death, extinction, range, niche and resources were threaded throughout the series of workshops as participants made ceramic shells that represented the loss of individual species, collected samples of marine and freshwater phytoplankton from local sources and analysed them under microscopes, and foraged for wild edibles.

Informed by the conceptual frameworks of preservation, social and ecosystems ecologies, Mark’s interventions and public

engagements exemplify approaches associated with Public Art, Participatory and Socially Engaged Practices. His series of ‘Missing Posters’ depicting the endangered solitary bee were installed along 14 beaches on the Wexford Coastline by the County Council’s beach maintenance crew, and remained in situ for over six months, generating a lot of public interest. This public art intervention demonstrated an innovative approach to the traditional notions of installation and graphic and informative design. The two video works which reflect on the solitary bee and Ballyteige Burrow — a designated Special Area of Conservation in Wexford — highlight the important impact of insects on local biodiversity, and the interconnectedness and vulnerability of our natural environment. Through his multifaceted approach to research and prolific output, Mark provided not only a rigorous examination of complex issues surrounding biodiversity loss but also afforded a platform for participants to reflect on and engage with.

**Dublin City** Fiona McDonald’s residency in Dublin City was research based, collaboratively developed and sensitively attuned to the surrounding ecologies of Bull Island. It was underpinned by an interdisciplinary practice which particularly focused on engagement with specialists from various fields, including botanists, zoologists, a hydrologist, an acoustic ecologist and a human geographer. The investigations and interviews conducted were informed by the deeper frameworks of ideology associated with conservation and preservation as well as industrial, human and ecosystem ecologies. The residency and public outcome addressed biodiversity issues associated with marine habitats, habitat loss and fragmentation, human behaviour, sustainability, range, evolution, mutation and niche, as well as notions of chaos, complexity, flux, technology and systems. The manifestation of this investigation and interaction was realised in the form of a



Site visit Cullenstown Beach, Wexford Think Tank 2018.

mobile application titled *Sensing Ecologies* which is based along a geo-located walk along the wooden bridge and North Bull Wall, Dublin. Through a series of interviews and soundscapes, the artwork explores environmental sensors, bio-indicators (plants and animals which act as sensors) and how this information might help in understanding or mitigating the effects of climate change. It examines how our environment is converging with technology, and how human anthropogenic activity is intentionally and unintentionally transforming our planet. Through *Sensing Ecologies* she not only bridged the languages and methodologies of art and science but also opened up reflective, eco-perceptive spaces for the audience to peer into the past, glimpse the complexity of the present, and imagine a future through a multispecies perspective.

**Fingal** Mary Conroy and Joanna Hopkin's residency in Fingal County was centred on community engagement as a research platform, which ultimately became the catalyst for the public outcome and created a space for public engagement, dialogue and discussion regarding conservation, interconnectedness, human activity and the natural world. Their collaboratively based practice unfolded through a series of field trips, volunteering engagements, conversations, archival research and direct encounters with the surrounding Special Areas of Conservation in Fingal — Rogerstown Estuary, Malahide Estuary, Baldoyle Bay, Ireland's Eye, Howth Head and North Dublin Bay. It followed that the ideological frameworks of conservation, preservation, human and ecosystem ecologies informed the artists' explorations of the loss and fragmentation of local marine habitats and the impact of human behaviour and pollution. Themes of life, death, extinction, evolution, mutation and niche permeated the residency as well as the public, live, participatory performance and installation, and the subsequent film and publication titled *Special Area of ConVersation*. As part of

the Bleeding Pig Festival Programme 2019 audiences were invited to engage in a processional ritual featuring a series of unfired clay eggs, created using Portrane Sand. Each egg was marked with a gold leaf map representing each of Fingal's Special Areas of Conservation which were carefully entrusted to the members of the community and carried to a significant site of coastal erosion along Burrow Beach. There, they were met by a performer who embodied a vision of the past, namely Frances Cobbe of Newbridge House, whose care and conservation of local natural worlds can be viewed in the House's Cabinet of Curiosities. The performer delivered participatory monologue where she asked those present to look after each representative egg, taking them and placing them in formation behind museum style barriers for their safety. Leaving the site alone, she left the audience while impressing upon and imploring them to connect with local ecological issues. The artists employed strategies of dramatisation, metaphorisation and investigation, and directly evoked the theoretical framework of Environmental Generational Amnesia. This theory explains each generation's perception of the environment into which it is born as being relative. For example, despite increasing development, urbanisation or pollution, this baseline of experience becomes 'natural.' This elicited a haunting and resonate feeling, ensuring that both the performance and the installation existed as an eloquent memorialization to past biodiversity and a stark warning for an undesirable yet potentially imminent future. This performance was produced as a film, and the process for *Special Area of ConVersation* as expressed through the *An Urgent Enquiry* Residency is also encapsulated in a limited edition artists' book. Fingal County Council have retained the fragile egg installation as part of its County Art Collection as a future archive to this moment in time, and while we will endeavour to preserve them we expect their further disintegration.

## CONCLUSION

The most important outcome of any Public Art commission is the development of new art. This can be produced and shared through many different outcomes or engagements as is evidenced above. We see this as essential, in that it offers multiple opportunities for public participation and communicates, celebrates and shares the artistic enquiry with as wide an audience as possible.

As an added benefit, particularly for local authorities and commissioners, this approach to Public Art can nurture a greater local understanding of the threats to biodiversity and the challenges of climate change and action. This in turn can enable stakeholders to reflect and engage with these complex themes through the lens of creativity and arts practice. This approach also feeds directly into Local Authority Climate Adaptation Plans, where a key aim is to build awareness and understanding around climate change amongst local communities.<sup>5</sup>

Specifically, local authorities play a critical role in addressing key areas such as housing, roads, flood defence and recreation, etc. and are more than ever informed by climate change awareness and knowledge. Having signed up to the 'Climate Action Charter'<sup>6</sup> in 2019, central government and all local authorities are now committed to addressing climate change in their work across all these areas, as outlined in their published Climate Adaptation Plans.

The crucial work and research realised through the collaborative efforts of *An Urgent Enquiry* have provided artists

Costal protection, Fingal.

5. See <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/41066-local-authority-adaptation-strategy-development-guidelines/>
6. <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/d914a-local-authority-climate-action-charter/>



and specialists with an opportunity to combine the collective expertise needed to engage public dialogue around the global issue of climate change and how it is manifesting at local level. At our highest aspirations, we hope that this project, embedded within multiple local environments, provided meaningful encounters with place and gave communities the opportunity to engage with a more emotive and imaginative way to problem solve. We hope that by providing a space for different perspectives and sometime difficult conversations, the Think Tank Sessions, Public Art, Residencies and multiple public outcomes will continue to lead to local action and behaviour change, all of which will ultimately benefit our shared global future.

## Appendix 1

### Resources and Links

#### *An Urgent Enquiry*

Online resource and shared information on the *An Urgent Enquiry* programme

[www.anurgentenquiry.ie](http://www.anurgentenquiry.ie)

Public Art: Per Cent for Art Scheme General National Guidelines (2004) [https://publicart.ie/fileadmin/user\\_upload/PDF\\_Folder/Public\\_Art\\_Per\\_Cent\\_for\\_Art.pdf](https://publicart.ie/fileadmin/user_upload/PDF_Folder/Public_Art_Per_Cent_for_Art.pdf)

Procurement Guidelines for Goods and Services.

<https://ogp.gov.ie/>

[public-procurement-guidelines-for-goods-and-services/](https://ogp.gov.ie/public-procurement-guidelines-for-goods-and-services/)

#### Engaging the Public on Climate Change through the Cultural Sectors

[www.CreativeIreland.gov.ie](http://www.CreativeIreland.gov.ie)

<https://climatejargonbuster.ie> – a government produced website featuring a glossary of terms which are very useful when considering the scope of the brief.

National organisations responsible for Climate Action:

<https://www.epa.ie/>

<https://www.caro.ie/>

<https://pollinators.ie/>

[www.cleancoasts.org](http://www.cleancoasts.org)

<https://www.npws.ie/>

<https://www.teagasc.ie>

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

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

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

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

<https://www.burrencollege.ie/programmes/>

[mfa-ma-in-art-ecology/](http://mfa-ma-in-art-ecology/)

<https://ecoartscotland.net>

<https://beaford.org>

<https://beaford.org>

<https://juliesbicycle.com>

## Appendix 2

### **An Urgent Enquiry Artists' Brief**

"In nature nothing exists alone" *Silent Spring*, Rachel Carson  
1962 \*

#### **Background**

Wexford County Council, Fingal County Council and Dublin City Council initiated a research project in 2017 titled *An Urgent Enquiry* with funding from the Arts Council under the *An Invitation to Collaboration* Scheme. Each local authority hosted a Think Tank at which artists, scientists and biodiversity experts presented approaches to art, biodiversity and climate change. The research project and enquiry has led to the next logical step and we are delighted to announce three significant artist residency commission opportunities in Wexford, Fingal and Dublin City. These commissioning opportunities will include collaboration with UK commissioning agency Invisible Dust, who will select one of the artists for an additional UK based residency in 2020. This international residency will expand upon specific themes relating to *An Urgent Enquiry* and their *Surroundings* Commissioning Programme.

#### **Invitation**

*An Urgent Enquiry* Artist's Residency Commission offers artists the opportunity to reside for three months in each county to explore the biodiversity of each area and the effects of climate change, through research, interactions with environmental specialists, scientists and advisors, relating to the artists interest and engaging with local communities with support from the local authority Arts

& Biodiversity Offices. There will be three residency commissions, one in Wexford, Dublin and Fingal. The outcome of each residency will result in new work/a public manifestation in autumn 2019. The selected artists will be supported throughout by *An Urgent Enquiry* steering group comprising of Arts & Biodiversity Officers and the Project Manager / Curator for *An Urgent Enquiry*, Denise Reddy.

#### **Research Locations**

Wexford: South Wexford Coastline

Fingal: Portrane and Rush Resorts

Dublin City: North Bull Island and Dublin Bay

#### **Art Form**

The curatorial panel are principally communicating these residency opportunities to the visual arts sector while acknowledging the scope for collaboration and interdisciplinary practices.

#### **Timeframe**

The residencies will take place over a three month time period from 1 May until 31 July, 2019. The outcome of each residency will be new work with a public manifestation in each county in 2019 and into 2020 where necessary.

#### **Budget**

Each residency in Ireland is valued at €20,000. In addition to this, self-catering accommodation will be provided free of charge by each local authority, inclusive of utility costs such as heating and lighting. Designated curatorial project support and assistance is offered throughout the process. The budget is inclusive of artist's fees, studio time, materials, VAT, process, production, insurance, outcomes and documentation.

## Context

“It’s not climate change it’s everything change” proclaimed Margaret Atwood as Ambassador for Invisible Dust’s symposium, *Under Her Eye – Women & Climate Change 2018*. \*

One of the greatest global issues of our time is climate change which effects biodiversity. *An Urgent Enquiry* and its considerations coincided with some of the most dramatic weather effects that Ireland has ever experienced. Predictions in relation to coastal erosion within fifty to a hundred year timeframes are already occurring earlier than anticipated and specifically along the east coast. In policy terms it will be increasingly a function of the local authorities to implement key changes and present opportunities for thinking, leadership and indeed moments of celebration of the unique local and collective biodiversity. In 2017 *The Department of Communications, Climate Action and the Environment* launched a nationwide *National Mitigation Plan* which was further supported in 2018 by the *National Adaption Framework* where the local authorities were placed to encourage the reduction of our carbon emissions through a series of collective acts.

*An Urgent Enquiry* highlighted the role of artist’s contribution to this debate and through a series of Think Tank sessions in each county we drew together artists, scientists, activists and policy makers. What struck the participants in all the sessions was the pursuit and commitment to find a way to address these global concerns within a local context and a belief in the role of artists to offer thought provoking responses to these local and global issues.

## Themes

The themes we explored collectively are nuanced in the areas of social, political and cultural attitudes. The common themes which emerged through the research phase were:

- Our shared coastline
- Climate change
- Disturbance
- The balance between nature and human activity
- Human awareness
- Understanding of place
- Interconnectedness
- Biodiversity and the unpredictability of the future in this regard.
- Unique flora and fauna
- Habitat loss and fragmentation

Artists by their nature of questioning, enquiry and creativity are well placed to offer insight, challenges and reflect on these issues.

- Objectives of *An Urgent Enquiry*
- To provide forums where those concerned with arts and biodiversity can meet to discuss issues and exchange ideas relating to this important matter of worldwide concern.
- To consider the urgent issues of biodiversity, climate change and the impacts of human activity on nature and nature on humans.
- To engage with and interact with the public.
- The outcome will be new art work presented in each county with an open forum discussion event in autumn, 2019.
- To support artists to collaborate meaningfully with biodiversity experts and to connect with local communities.
- To position Irish artists within a developed international profile with *Invisible Dust*, UK.

## Curatorial Panel

The curatorial panel for the residency commission opportunity are:

**Liz Burns**, Arts Officer, Wexford County Council

**Caroline Cowley**, Public Art Coordinator, Fingal County Council

**Ruairí Ó Cuív**, Public Arts Officer, Dublin City Council

**Hans Visser**, Biodiversity Officer, Fingal County Council

**Niamh Lennon**, Planning and Biodiversity Officer, Wexford County Council

**Lorraine Bull**, Biodiversity Officer, Dublin City Council

**Denise Reddy**, Project Manager/ Curator

## Selection Process

Artists are invited through an open call to submit a proposal.

Shortlisted applicants will be invited to attend an interview in

March 2019 with panel members prior to the final selection. Each applicant will be considered for any one of the residency locations unless a location has been specified.

## Proposals

Please provide a **PDF (Max 10 MB)** which includes the following:

- Contact details: Mobile number, postal, email and website address.
- A short text on why this commission is of interest to you and how you imagine working in co-operation with biodiversity experts. How your work could interact with communities and initial views on the possible outcomes of the residency commission. (maximum 1 A4 page)

- Examples of previous work.
- A maximum of 8 images with image list.
- Film and video work must be a maximum of 5 mins. Please provide vimeo links.
- Audio work must be a maximum of 5mins. Please provide audio links.
- A current C.V. (maximum 2 A4 pages)
- A budget breakdown

Please specify if you have a preference for a particular residency location.

## Criteria

Applicants will be assessed on the following criteria:

- Quality and artistic ambition
- Track record
- Feasibility of the project
- Cultural and environmental value

**Closing Date for Submissions: DD/MM/YYYY**

**Closing date for receipt of submissions: DD/MM/YYYY**

Online application only. Late submissions will not be assessed.

Please email your proposal to [anurgentenquiry@gmail.com](mailto:anurgentenquiry@gmail.com)

## Queries

Applicants are welcome to submit queries to Denise Reddy, *An Urgent Enquiry* Project Manager & Curator who will be the conduit between all the partnering local authorities. Please email your queries to [anurgentenquiry@gmail.com](mailto:anurgentenquiry@gmail.com)

**Closing date for queries: DD/MM/YYYY**



## Essential Requirements

The successful applicants must:

- Be available for the timeframe of the residency commission and public outcome.
- Have their own transport as residency locations may not be near public transport.
- Have a valid tax clearance certificate.
- Provide Public Liability insurance cover of €6.5 million and Employers Liability to €13 million (where employees are engaged to work on the commission) with an indemnity to Wexford County Council, Fingal County Council or Dublin City Council, depending on the location of the residency.

## General Conditions

- Late submissions will not be accepted.
- All PDF submissions should be clearly labelled with the applicant's name and contact details.
- As this is an Open Call competition there will be no feedback after Stage 1.
- The selection panel, whose decision is final, has the right to clarify any issue which may arise in the course of selection.
- Artists may be asked to supply the names and contact details of referees as part of the selection process.
- Wexford County Council; and its partners reserves the right not to award commissions and in this instance reserves the right to pursue other selection processes.

## Terms and Conditions

- The successful artist will be issued with a contract.
- The artwork must comply with Health and Safety standards. The successful submission will be subject to Health and Safety checks.
- Child and Vulnerable Adults Protection: Selected artists will be required to follow national policy with regard to commissions involving interaction with children, young people and, vulnerable adults and where applicable undergo training in this area, as per national requirements.
- Applicants should note that all commissions awarded are VAT inclusive, (whether VAT liability lies with the artist or the Commissioner). Non-resident artists from EU and non-EU countries must be aware of any tax or VAT implications arising from the commission and ensure that any costs arising from this are included in their budget.
- Wexford County Council, Fingal County Council and Dublin City Council are subject to the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act (FOI) 1997, 2003. If you consider that any of the information supplied by you is either commercially sensitive or confidential in nature, this should be highlighted and the reasons for the sensitivity specified. In such cases, the relevant material will, in response to the FOI request, be examined in the light of the exemptions provided for in the Acts.



## CREDITS

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1. Artists
2. Significant locations of Biodiversity
3. Arts Officers
4. Biodiversity Officers
5. Project managers
6. Environmental Educational Officers,  
Climate Action Regional Officers
7. Historical Institutions that shape the  
ways we think about the natural world  
(Museums, Public Private Collections,  
Interpretive Centers, UNESCO  
Heritage sites, Biosphere reserves)
8. Academic and Educational Institutions  
that shape the ways we think about  
the natural world (Universities,  
Colleges, Libraries, Royal Irish  
Academy)
9. Professionals in scientific fields
10. Other Artists, Musicians, Cultural  
producers, etc.
11. Local festivals and programming
12. Citizen Scientist Groups,  
Volunteer Groups engaged in local  
environmental activities