

# Oileán

## Eóin Ó Conaill and Youth of Oileán Chléire



Eóin Ó'Conaill Pier 2010

*"The images set out to document the diverse people and landscapes that make up Cape Clear Island, from portraits of native cape clear residents, young people and newcomers to the community, the photographs set out to capture a fresh, new perspective of a unique people and place."*

Eóin Ó'Conaill

### Partners:

West Cork Arts Centre (Youth Co-ordinator,  
Alison Cronin)  
Tír na Spraoi (Judith Gilbert)  
Eóin Ó'Conaill, photographer  
The community of Oileán Chléire

### Funders:

National Youth Council of Ireland  
Údarás na Gaeltachta

### Sponsors:

iophotoworks, Cork

### Participants:

Diarmuid O'Céadagáin,  
Fay Langley,  
Pat Leonard,  
Sadhbh Ní Mhéalóid,  
Cian McCann,  
Johanna Ní Dhrisceoil,  
Aodh O'Drisceoil,  
Nora Jane Ní Mhéalóid,  
Ephraim O'Ceallaigh,  
Siobhán Ní Dhrisceoil,  
Michael Purcell,  
Mary Purcell,  
Bridget Purcell.

## Outline

This project aimed to create a body of photographic work based on the lives of the young people of Oileán Chléire. The project was run as part of West Cork Arts Centre's youth outreach programme. The young people of the island collaborated with photographer Eóin Ó'Conaill through a series of workshops over a 5 month period to create a body of work that was exhibited at WCAC as part of the Skibbereen Arts Festival.

The workshops included technical aspects of photography, looking at the work of contemporary photographers, and getting out and about taking photos around the island. Later sessions included exploring ways of presenting the work, mounting, framing and an involvement in hanging their own work. The final exhibition included work by both the young participants themselves as well as work developed by Eóin Ó'Conaill during his time on the island, a diverse body of work linked by the shared landscape.

Oileán Chléire is a Gaeltacht region and the project was conducted in Irish throughout.

Throughout the project ongoing evaluation was carried out by Eóin Ó'Conaill, Judy Gilbert and Alison Cronin, who used regular discussions with the group to assess progress. The project was documented through photography. Alison's visits to the project allowed extra time for reflection through video interviews of all involved, and Eóin and Judy reported back to Alison regularly via email on how the project was progressing.

*"Before, I didn't know anything on the computer, the photoshopping, or the way to take photos, my photos were awful"*  
Fay, participant



*"I was just looking around and it was so cool, some of the old stone walls and stuff"*  
Sadhbh, participant

**Evaluation focused on the following four key areas:**

- The young people's development (artistic and otherwise)
- The artist's practice
- Involvement / benefit to the island community.
- Sustainability

**Measures of success:**

- The production of a body of work for the artist that will contribute to his ongoing art practice
- The production of a body of work by the participants of which they are proud and will lead to a continuing interest in photography
- A marked development in the photographic skills and confidence of the group over the course of the project
- Positive comment from the local community on how the project has represented and benefited the island

*"I feel that my work is a part of, is in tune with, what the young people are doing"*  
Eóin Ó'Conaill



*"If I see something that I like I go, yeah, that should be on camera and I take it"*  
Fay, participant

**The young people's development**

Eóin reported a strong interest in the project from the very first session. Initially the group was slow to find ideas and produce work between sessions. Because of this, the plan to meet for a full weekend only once a month was revised to aim for more frequent shorter weekends in order to maintain momentum. Getting all participants together in the same place at the same time was a constant challenge, partly due to the nature of this age group and their many other interests and commitments, and partly due to the island location and ferry timetable. The weekends often evolved organically, planned around the most likely times for availability, and working with whoever showed up each day.

The benefit of this was that Eóin could give participants more individual attention where necessary. Much of what the participants seem to have learned has been not only about the camera itself and the process of taking good photos, but the use of the editing software, and the possibilities for what can be done with photographs, and how stories can be told and ideas presented. By the time the young people were visiting the WCAC for hanging the show, they had clear ideas on how they wanted their projects displayed and the thinking behind them.

*“To start with they weren’t very focused, and as they went through the process of taking photographs and looking at their surroundings and examining where they live, and how they live, they became more focused”*

Judy, Tír na Spraoi

*“When we heard we were going to be doing a photography project I think everyone had a fairly similar view of what photography was, but as the project moved along we realised that photography was many different things”*

Nora Jane, participant



Nora Jane gives a speech at the opening of the exhibition in front of Eóin’s work.

### The artist’s practice

Eóin initially found it hard to find the time to spend on developing his own work when over on the island for weekends with the group as his focus was with them. He began to spend more time there, outside of the group sessions to get to know the island. His work with the young people and Judy meant that he found it easier to get to know people and places on the island and could arrange to meet with people to take portraits as they knew who he was and why he was there.

The resulting work included portraits, landscapes and interiors and Eóin plans to develop this work further, continuing to visit the island in the hopes of producing a book of photographs.

*“Overall, I feel this project has had a strong impact on me professionally as an artist, developing my experience by working with and learning from the young people. I have learned a great deal from working with people on the Island and everyone at the WCAC. I have a new understanding of the importance of art within the community and the impact such projects contribute not only to the participants but also to the wider community.”*

Eóin Ó’Conaill



Eóin Ó'Conaill, *Tommy*, 2010

*"The images challenge conventional views of the picturesque and focus instead on the human presence within the landscape, calling attention to the unique personality and strength of the community that reside on Cape Clear Island."*

Eóin Ó'Conaill

*"It's about arranging a time to go visit them and spending an hour, that's what I found worked best, when people are relaxed and they're not rushed"*

Eóin Ó'Conaill

### **The island community**

Many members of the island community came to the exhibition opening, showing great support for the project and for Eóin and the young people. Many of them were involved in one way or another, either as parents or friends of the young people involved, or they, their houses or land had been photographed by Eóin or the young people and they were interested to see the results. In particular it was commented that it was nice to see a project come to the island that had a longer more sustained involvement than other projects they may have experienced. A second exhibition of the work took place on Oileán Chléire over a weekend in the autumn and the opening was attended by most of the Island community.

*"There's a lot of local interest, like it's a good community so people tend to, when you know something's happening in another sphere of this community, people radiate towards it to see what they're doing"*

Judy Gilbert, Tír na Spraoi

*"[Eóin's] got to know people, especially over the last 3 weekends that he's been here, he's got to know more of the locals, and been out and about with them, talking to folk about his project and they've all been very positive"*

Judy Gilbert, Tír na Spraoi

*"At this stage I've probably photographed, or threatened to photograph, half the island"*

Eóin Ó'Conaill



Visitors to the exhibition opening looking at *Mary* by Eóin Ó'Conaill

*"I think it's really cool seeing all the pictures up, and Eóin's are a different kind of style, but really funny, about like, all the people sitting there drinking tea"*

Diarmuid, participant

### Sustainability

With the end of this project the regular meetings with Eóin and the teenagers finished, however there will be longer term outcomes. Many of the teenagers appreciated having a reason to meet with their own age group on the island and this has led Judy to consider setting up regular meeting dates for them, and perhaps come up with their own projects to work on. Many of them will also continue their interest in photography.

Eóin's relationship with the island will continue, he is planning to seek further funding to continue his own work on the island, with a view to producing a book. He has also made many friends there and those links will continue.

A number of the young people have become friends with WCAC's Youth Arts page on facebook, allowing them to keep in touch with our programme and a facebook group page is being set up as a long term web presence for the project. The local shop has also spoken of helping cover the cost for the young people to print postcards from some of their island views to be sold there.

*"Initially I thought I would see this as an end point, the exhibition, whereas now I see it more as a halfway point"*

Eóin Ó'Conaill

*"I'll definitely continue taking pictures"*  
Nora Jane, participant

*"It's given them a chance to spend a bit more time together in a different setting and a different context  
as well"*  
Judy, Tír na Spraoi



Image from *Nathaíocht Bogshodar (Canter Banter)* by Johanna Ní Dhrisceoil

*"I did my photo project on horses as I find them very interesting. I also work them. I have seven of my own so I saw this as an opportunity to have more fun with my horses and show what ways they interact."*  
Johanna, participant



Image from *Anseo agus Anuigh (Home and Away)* by Siobhán Ní Dhrisceoil

*“I’ve grown up here and I’ve lived here all my life, but then I go to Secondary School on the mainland and it’s kind of two different lives and I’d like to show how they contrast against each other”*  
Siobhán, participant

## Conclusion

This project was a success on many levels. If we return to the measures of success, outlined earlier we can see that they as well as others have been fulfilled;

- A body of work was produced by the artist that will contribute to his ongoing practice and he intends to continue working with the island to produce a book.
- A body of work was produced by the participants of which they are proud.
- A continuing interest in photography has been generated amongst the group, as well as an interest in continuing to meet regularly together.
- A marked development in the group’s skills and confidence has been demonstrated.
- There has been positive comment from the local community, as well as an active engagement with the project from many members of the community.

Further funding would have enabled better access to equipment and more time to be dedicated to the project, but with the resources available the project has had a positive and sustained impact on the young people, the artist and the community.

*“We’d great fun doing it, and I’m proud to see it on the wall”*  
Pat, participant

*“To my knowledge there has not been a comprehensive photographic project looking artistically at the people and the way of life on Cape to date. My intention is to apply to funding bodies in the hope of securing support to continue this work and to publish a final selection of photographs in book format alongside an exhibition of the completed works. Such a publication would leave a lasting presence and document of Cape Clear Island as it is in 2010/11, both for the people of Cape Clear, the wider Island community of Ireland and for the general population of Ireland.”*  
Eóin Ó’Conaill



Image from *Anann is anall (Back and forth)* by Pat Leonard

**A selection of comments from the Exhibition 'Comments Book':**

*A Cape of many lives! Thanks!*  
Chuck and Nell Kruger (islanders)

*Beautiful photographs, well captured*  
Emma Mooney

*Fab pictures! Cape and its people look great!!*  
Susie Cadogan

*I think the picture of Hannah Collins is great.*  
Fay Langley (participant)

*Wonderful insight into the lives of young people on Cape – loved the images*  
Monica Boyle

*Brilliant project I really enjoyed it*  
Hannah Collins (islander, featured in a portrait by Eóin)

*Enjoyed seeing artist's work alongside young people's from group*  
Marie Brett (artist and arts facilitator)

*Lovely evocation of the island, good work.*  
Tim O'Mahony

Visitors to the exhibition included people from Cape Clear, Cork city and county, Dublin, Norway, France and Holland.