



## Sirius Arts Centre

Cobh, Co. Cork, Ireland

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Email: [cobharts@iol.ie](mailto:cobharts@iol.ie) Web: <http://www.siriusartscentre.ie>

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# Final Report for Culture Ireland –See Here Grant International Photographic Portfolio Reviews in Cobh, County Cork 5 & 6 February 2011

## Summary of Project:

Sirius Arts Centre organised a two-day session of International Photographic Portfolio Reviews in Cobh County Cork on the 5 & 6 of February. The event took place in the Commodore Hotel, adjacent to Sirius Arts Centre in Cobh and ran from 10:00AM – 4:00pm each day.

The event invited 8 international and 4 Irish curators for the main review programme with an additional 3 Irish and 1 international reviewer on a ‘floating review’ panel. The ‘floating review panel’ reviewed on Saturday only.

A total of 73 photographers from Ireland and abroad participated in this event with each photographer averaging 3 meetings with reviewers over the 2 day session. Each session consisted of a photographer and a reviewer meeting face to face for 25 minutes to discuss the photographer’s images, to critique, give feedback and consider potential opportunities to further the photographer’s work.

## Selection of Participants

Sirius Arts Centre put out a call for entries, charging a €10 euro entry fee to help support a vetting team to go through all the applications with Artistic Director of Sirius Arts Centre, Peggy Sue Amison in order to co-ordinate photographers applying with appropriate curators, Irish photographers, David Farrell and Harry Moore assisted me in this vetting process (Mark Curran was to be the fourth vetting assistant, but was unable to attend).

The call out was sent to VAI in Ireland, Gallery of Photography in Dublin, Belfast Exposed in Northern Ireland and Universities in Ireland. Additionally, the callout was sent to a plethora of other contacts which I’ve collected over the last 5 years. I have been a regular reviewer at International Photographic Portfolio Reviews in Europe and America and have developed an international network of photographers, photographic curators and festival directors in Europe and abroad.

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Only 3 photographers who submitted were not included in the reviews: one due to incorrect submission of his files (ie they couldn't be opened), one was a wedding photographer (work not appropriate for this portfolio review) and one did not have a cohesive body of work ready to be reviewed.

One photographer did not show up on the day of reviews and two were ill and unable to attend.

### **Background to this project**

After Cork was Capital of Culture in 2005 I began researching photographic festivals to consider the possibility of organising a similar event in Cork. I was invited to review at many festivals in Europe and America to review portfolios. During 6 years of reviewing I've found two things reoccurring that have caught my attention – One is the curiosity of European Photographic Curators about what Irish photography is and where it stands at this moment in time, and two is the lack of Irish photographers present at these international portfolio reviews. It seems that unless an Irish photographer leaves Ireland and studies abroad, they have no notion that this opportunity to meet a curator one on one exists for them.

In 2009 I was asked by Krzysztof Candrowicz to be one of three co-curators of an exhibition they were mounting in Lodz Poland for the 9<sup>th</sup> annual Lodz International Fotofestival. Together with Christoph Tannert Director of Künstlerhaus Bethanien in Berlin, we curated an exhibition titled *All My Lovin* which took as its theme relationships and family. As part of this co-curation we agreed that we would try to bring the exhibition to each of our countries following the opening of the exhibition in May 2010.

Wanting to promote Irish photography through this exhibition, I asked a number of Irish photographers to submit their work to be considered for the exhibition in Lodz. Of the numerous photographers I submitted, 4 Irish artists were chosen by the panel. They included Muireann Brady (based in West Cork), Ameila Stein (based in Dublin), Sandra Minchin and Chris Hurley (both of whom are based in Cork). In total 19 photographers were included in the initial exhibition of *All My Lovin*, which opened as the Main Programme of the 9<sup>th</sup> Annual International Festival of Photography in Lodz, Poland.

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A selection of the work then travelled to Berlin where it was exhibited in Künstlerhaus Bethanien and a few works (including Sandra Minchin and Chris Hurley) travelled on to Trier to be exhibited in a photo festival there that Christoph Tannert was the curator of.

I approached the Crawford Art Gallery in Cork to see if they would have an interest in exhibiting this collective exhibition and luckily they had the space available. The final exhibition that travelled to Cork included 17 of the 19 original artists.

To celebrate this exhibition, which was the largest international exhibition of photography ever to be mounted in Cork, I decided to try and talk to some of the artist led spaces that have recently developed in the area to see if they would be interested in mounting photographic exhibitions at the same time, to support the exhibition in the Crawford and also to provide a wider forum for photography. In the end I was able to partner with: Basement Project Space, Camden Palace Hotel, Cork Institute of Technology, iophotoworks, St. John's College and Stag and Deer. Additionally, West Cork Arts Centre came on board after I introduced them to James Gallagher, a curator in Brooklyn who is working with contemporary collage artists. Those organisations, in addition to the show in the Crawford Gallery and the Sirius Arts Centre made up this photographic event in Cork.

I have wanted to organise a portfolio review session in Cork for a long time. Known more commonly as "International Meeting Places for Photography" I thought it would be a great way to enlighten both photographers and curators to Irish photography and open up opportunities for emerging Irish Artists.

Thanks to Culture Ireland I was able to get a grant of €3,000, which allowed me to bring the curators, covering flights and accommodation. For the artists I chose to ask a fee of €10. Most festivals would charge hundreds of euros to participate in these meeting places, but seeing that this was the first time such an event has been organised in Ireland, I felt I needed to keep the fee low so that the photographers would feel welcomed to participate and could learn the benefits of what these type of events can offer them.

### Actual Event and Outcomes

Initially we planned to organise the reviews here in the Sirius Arts Centre, but after careful consideration we decided it would be better to utilize the Commodore Hotel just adjacent to the Sirius – as it would be more comfortable for the photographers while they waited between

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sessions and would benefit the hotel. It would also encourage people to stay in Cobh and to have meals and food in the local area. The hotel also has a number of large lobbies where the artists could network with each other between sessions (please see enclosed video for more information).

Another change I made to the normal portfolio review was to have a number of Irish photographers and one American photographer who reviewed on the Saturday only. These photographers volunteered their time to review – The photographers are all respected both as artists and instructors of photography. They were: David Farrell, Mark Curran, Harry Moore and Doug Dubois. This method was another way (along with the low admission fee) to include photographers into this review that were almost ready to meet international curators but could do with feedback on basic photographic skills. In return for these ‘floating reviewer’s’ time we organised a few reviews for them and their work on the Sunday and included them in the group meals with the curators.

The first responses from the participants and the reviewers have been astounding. A number of photographers are now in negotiations with the curators about potential shows in Europe or have established contacts that they can go back to for advice or assistance. A few examples include

**Dragan Tomas** – a self taught photographer living in Cork has been offered a show in this years Encontros da Imagem Festival in Braga Portugal by its Director, Rui Prata.

**Dragana Juristic** – based in Dublin, has had continued assistance from Lars Boering Director of Lux Gallery in the Netherlands. She may also exhibit in Portugal and with Belfast Exposed.

**Charlie Jovet** - A French photographer visiting from Berlin may have the opportunity to exhibit his work “The Tributaries” in Germany and the Netherlands with the help of Celina Lunsford and Lars Boering. Lars and Celina saw Charlie’s work during a walking tour that was organised for the curators on the Friday morning. Lars has also passed on a book of Charlie’s work to his colleague Maarten Schilt at Schilt Publishing.

Aside from Dragan Tomas **Rui Prata** from Braga, Portugal has reported back to me that he is hoping to work with the following photographers, all of whom he had reviewed in Cobh: In 2011 he wants to work with **Dragan and Mark Curran**, in 2012 he is interested in working with Irish Artist **Paul Corcoran** and **Gary Coyle**, American Photographer **Doug Dubois**

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along with British photographer based in New York **Phil Toledano**. He's also interested in working with **Fiona Hackett, David Moore, Clare Keogh and Thibault Puy Fontaine**.

**Lars Boering** the Director of Lux Gallery in Amsterdam reported the following: *“What I have done since i'm back is getting in touch with some of the people i have talked to in Cobh. I have advised some of them on what to do in the next future. I'm in touch with **Ian Teh** about his work and him getting a book ready for his show in London. I also was in touch with **Dragan Juresic** and promoted her work a little bit. I will also see if I can help **Mark Curran** some more. I already started working with **Phil Toledano**. Love his work.*

*I have talked to the curator of the Naarden Photo festival about his and **Charlie Jouvett** work (the projection of pinhole portraits). They are discussing it tonight. It would be great if i can get them in both. I have given the dummy by Charlie to Maarten. He's looking at it and will let me know what his thoughts are. I would like to get the 'Days of my father' show to Holland after the show in Ireland. Do you think this is possible? “*

These are just some of the reports I have had in response to the reviews so far.

The event overall I feel has been a tremendous success for everyone. The events organised in Cork in February celebrating photography have been incredibly busy – the opening of *All My Lovin* in the Crawford Art Gallery had over 400 people in attendance and over 1,000 visitors on Saturday the 5 of February. **Since its opening on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Feb the Crawford reported to me that they have had in excess of 20,000 visitors to their space.** Openings in the West Cork Arts Centre, Sirius Arts Centre, Stag and Deers spaces in Cork all had over 200 in attendance at openings and foot fall has been heavy in all locations. Camden Palace has reported a 50% increase in people coming through their door to see the 2 exhibitions there and Basement Project Space has also reported an increase in attendance. Both exhibitions mounted by the Colleges (CIT/Crawford Art College and St. John's College) had overwhelming responses to their openings as well (please see documentary images for more information).

It's obvious to me that these events have proved there is an audience for contemporary photography Cork. The Crawford have since expressed an interest in working with Sirius in future on a similar exhibition in 2 years time. I'm currently organising meetings with the artist lead spaces, as well as with the Glucksman Gallery, the Crawford Art Gallery and the West Cork Arts Centre on a future event to celebrate photography in Cork in 2013.

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