

Cross Land was a temporary Public Artwork made by Deirdre O'Mahony in the Burren in 2007 that examined the ecological and physical effects of changes in regulation in farming practices as evidenced in the growth of Hazel scrub in the Burren. *Cross Land* takes the form of a coppiced 'X' or cross. Each arm, 60 metres long and 1.5m wide, was cut through an area of dense scrub near Carron in North Clare. The intervention was intended to generate a dialogue concerning some of the complex issues affecting land use in the area and evident in the spread of the scrub.

The project involved site research and consultation with farmers, ecologists and BurrenLIFE between 2006-2007. The marginal land where the 'X' was cut exemplified the problem of the Hazel spread. The farmer who owned the land used for the project said that it was called "cross" land; hard to work, hard to access and hard for the animals.

Research: The original intention was to draw attention to the decrease in the numbers of the feral goats on the Burren and the role they play in grazing the scrub. The goats have been a marked presence in the Burren for many years and up to 2003 large herds could be seen roaming the region. In recent years many have been culled and numbers have decreased dramatically. The recent disappearance of the great Burren goat herds and the beginning of the spread of the hazel seemed to correspond. The goats have long been a source of local dispute. Some farmers complained that they knocked down stone field walls and destroyed pasture. With the implementation of the Rural Environmental Protection Scheme (REPs) and the obligations it places on farmers to preserve their lands, including the dry-stone walls, they were perceived as a threat to subsidies.

Research by BurrenLIFE into changing farming practices in the Burren suggests that several factors have affected the spread of the scrub in the region. REPs was very popular in the Burren. This scheme is designed to support more ecologically sustainable practices such as heritage farming, as part of a strategy to maintain and support regional diversity and local ecology. However the farming of inaccessible marginal lands has become very difficult with increasingly complex regulations by different agencies affecting planning and land use. Limited available labour, poor market returns and the use of different breeds and feeding systems compound the problem. Access for tractors to clear marginal land of the scrub is very difficult without permission for tracks and clearing by hand is extremely labour intensive. Marginal lands are not being used for grazing and have reverted to scrub. There are a number of agencies involved in regulating the Burren including the land used for the project in 2007. Part of the Burren is a designated National Park coming under the remit of the National Parks and Wildlife Service, which enforces the relevant Wildlife acts. Much but not all of the Burren is also a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) established under the European Union Habitats Directive. The Department of Agriculture regulates farming and it oversees the Rural Environmental Protection Scheme (REPS). The archaeological sites in the area are the responsibility of the National Monuments Service. Permission for the construction of buildings comes from the planning office for the local authority, in this case Clare County Council. Farmers have to comply with all the regulations while working their land from day to day.

Documentation: The site used was not overlooked by an accessible vantage point and had to be documented from the air. A flyover using a kite, a small, light camera and cradle with an infra red trigger was used to take the image. This was then printed as a limited edition and copies given to the participants. The print was later included as part of an exhibition, *10,000 to 50* at the Irish Museum of Modern Art in 2008.

Consultation: A *Cross Land* office was set up during September 2006 in Cassidy's pub in Carron. The objective was to answer questions and to listen to comments, opinions about local issues. The experience brought home the change that has taken place in usage of rural pubs in recent years- on all but one of the eight evenings spent in the pub, there was no more than four customers and most stayed for one drink and left. The pub now closes during weekdays during the winter months. Cassidy's was used to launch the project and prior to the launch there was a 'gathering' of participants involved with the project that included farmers, BurrenLIFE, artists, REPs agents and tourism development agencies. The meeting was designed to give some of the stakeholders including the regulatory and funding representatives, the opportunity to meet face-to-face and discuss the future for farming in the Burren.

The realisation of the project involved an engagement between artist, agency, landowner, scientist, business interests and inhabitants. The 'X' became an image able to raise as many questions; suggest as many meanings as there were people to look at it. A small thread of the web of the interdependencies governing people and place, local, national interests, agendas and regulation has been grasped.

Following *Cross Land* it was evident to the artist that a long-term, visible, public exchange process was required to address the wider social and ecological issues arising in rural contexts like the Burren and this prompted the development of the *X-PO* project at Kilnaboy which revived the former post-office in order to activate a discourse on maintaining an active, inclusive, social community whilst remaining in contact with the knowledge and sense of place that comes from a long, reflective consideration and involvement with locality.

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Deirdre O'Mahony is an artist and presently completing her PhD at the University of Brighton titled *New Ecologies between Rural Life and Visual Culture in the West of Ireland: History, Context, Position, and Art Practice*. Solo exhibitions include *re-presentations*; the BCA Gallery 2009, *Viscqueux*; GAF Galway 2006, *Wall*; Context Gallery Derry and LCGA, 2002 and *WRAP*; GAC Galway 2000. Group exhibitions: *10,000 to 50*, IMMA Dublin 2008, *Eire/Land* McMullen Museum Boston, 2003. International and national awards include a Pollock-Krasner Foundation Fellowship, 1995 and Visual Arts Bursaries from the Arts Council of Ireland/An Chomhairle Ealaíonn, 1997/2001 and 2010. She has received project Funding Awards from the Arts Council for *X-PO* in 2007 and *Abandoned Clare* 2010/11 and is a full-time Lecturer in Painting at Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology in Galway. Website: <http://deirdre-omahony.ie> and <http://x-po.ie>