Abandoned Clare
Deirdre O’Mahony
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ABANDONED CLARE

We'll it's about abandonment. Not always a physical abandonment either. It's the abandonment of hopes, of dreams, of expectation. It's the abridgement of a people and a place that is the thing. As it's put in Citizen Kane: ‘Forty-nine thousand acres of nothing but scenery and statues. I'm lonesome.' People need more than history, they need a future and they need to believe they can have a future. All too often people in authority forget that, particularly so it seems those in government in recent times. Fortunately there's always someone even in the most challenging of circumstances who will keep trying even if the odds are stacked against them. And a good thing there is too. We need the dreamers and the fools. We need our Xanadus and our Towers of Babel. So whilst on one hand Abandoned Clare is about failure and defeat it also is implicitly about the strength of the human spirit. We're not talking about an unfettered capitalism that will abandon a locale because they can make t-shirts for two pennies a thousand elsewhere. We're talking about people who believe in a place; its history, its present and future. The farmers, the teachers, the business people, even the artists. We need a people who will hang in there for as long as they can in the face of economic ruin as well as governmental folly and negligence. Otherwise it will be all about scenery and statues. Nothing else.

Following on from our successful Abandoned Donegal project Abridged is collaborating with Co Clare based artist, Deirdre O’Mahony, on Abridged 0 – 20: Abandoned Clare. Whereas Abandoned Donegal focused on, in the main, urban commercial property, the Clare project sees the focus shift to contemporary rural abandonment as economic and social factors that have forced the abandonment of the rural in favour of the urban are visually articulated and explored. The social implications of rural abandonment further isolate and marginalize vulnerable rural populations, contribute to poorer demographics and aging rural populations, lead to a loss of land management skills, knowledge and tradition, and the loss of social and community structures can lead to adverse health factors including depression and alcoholism. Abandoned buildings and the accompanying abandoned land can also have an adverse effect on the environment.

O’Mahony has already examined the ecological effects of abandonment through the public artwork, Cross Land, an exploration of the regulatory, ecological and physical effects of changes in farming practices as evidenced in the growth of Hazel scrub in the Burren. Abandonment of land may also lead to the loss in landscape value, and of course access to this landscape. Many species of plant and animal have evolved to become dependent on a degree of human impact through agriculture for their survival; once agriculture stops these species are threatened.

This project allows Abridged to continue its stated policy of innovative visual art/magazine collaborations, producing work that is artistically excellent and socially relevant. Abridged 0 – 20: Abandoned Clare examines the nature of change.

It stands as a reflection of the times and as a warning to the future.

Gregory McCartney
Abridged

ABANDONED CLARE

‘BAD’ NOSTALGIA OR RE-MEMBERING?

The opening of the Abandoned Clare exhibition in the X-PO in Kilnaboy, North Clare is appropriate on many levels. The former post office closed in 2003 and like some of the buildings documented in Abandoned Clare, it has since changed function and purpose. Reopened as a durational public art project in 2007 it performs as a socio-cultural prism, reflecting the interests of incomers and longstanding residents and aspects of the local and the global, much as the post office used to do when it served the diverse communities of the area. The old post office had become an abject and forlorn reminder of rural conviviality. Now reframed as an artwork it functions as an active reflexive space providing a location for the collective public consideration of place-based knowledge.

Farming is the primary economic mainstay in the region. The imminent reconfiguration of EU agricultural subsidies in 2013 means that the maintenance of ‘farming landscape’, or sustainable heritage farming will become an option for farmers in North Clare in coming years. This policy reconfiguration represents a paradigmatic shift from conceptualising rural environments as sites for raw food and energy production to recognising the ‘design value’ of rural areas as arenas for cultural production. In North Clare, although family farming is still the main means of generating income at present, it is now increasingly combined with off-farm work. The generation of farmers for whom ‘traditional’ smallholding was a way of life will soon be retiring. Making visible the scale and nature of rural farm closures Abandoned Clare draws attention to the mute traces of specific, local, farming knowledge that are vanishing, along with their potential value to future generations.

Agri-culture has inspired the local social, cultural and economic logic in County Clare. In pre-Celtic Tiger’ times when property was cheap, people from all over the world with interests in ecological self-sufficiency and alternative ways of living settled in the region. The formation of a co-operative school in Roxton near Corofin was evidence of social movements in the locality in the early 1980s. Called ‘the Shed’ the school was later expanded to include a shop, a restaurant, a playgroup, a window manufacturing company and a Liscannor stone workshop. In time, children grew up, people moved and in 2009 the only part of the complex in use was the window company and the stone workshop, now used as a car repair shop. The abandoned school building may once more find a new purpose as it expands to include car dismantlers. The story is not over, simply taking a new turn.

The repair shops for electrical equipment, bicycles, tractors, and the businesses that supported these trades have closed. The craft skills used by men like Paddy Cahir from Rinnamona, who built a fine stone cowshed with his brother Sean are being lost. Paddy made carts, wired houses, plastered walls, cut stone and built walls. His father John Cahir was a wheelwright and an artist, in Barrie Cooke’s Map of Kilnamona 1954 – 1984, he is named along with others in the area. Now all the businesses in Kilnamona are gone; the tailor, the blacksmith, the three shops, the last of which, Mary Shop’s, closed in the 1990s. Cooke’s Kilnamona home where he lived when he first arrived in Ireland, stands empty and derelict.

The march of globalisation is evident in the multi-national supermarkets opening in out-of-town shopping centres in medium size towns like Ennis and Kilrush. Grocery shops, creameries,
pubs, butchers and post offices are gradually closing in places like Mullagh and Ballyea. Cinemas are dark in Scarriff and Kilrush, and in Ennis traders are finding it hard to compete with internet shopping. Ennistymon's famous shop and pub fronts are full of estate agent signs and an iconic landmark like Blake's corner in Ennistymon is presently a contested planning issue as it is scheduled for demolition or relocation to make room for a new access route to Lahinch.

The intention with Abandoned Clare is not to lament a lost utopian past but to stimulate, provoke and provide evidence of other ways of doing things. When reviewing the relationship between radicalism and nostalgia Lucy Lippard reminds us that ‘utopia, too is a necessary and authentic goal, the object of a longing that may never be fulfilled but functions positively and authentically for just that reason.’ By making visible the ruins of abandonment, the bike repair shop, the mushroom farm, the alternative school, the images remind the viewer of the frugal, mindful habits, the utopian dreams that once played out in rural Clare.

Given the near-collapse of the unregulated free-market economy, is there now a case for re-visiting a revived idea of rural collectivism in the face of anxiety over food security and the unsustainability of an agricultural system entirely dependent on oil? Lippard makes a case for emotional retrospection, balanced by local knowledge and critical curiosity. This quality is best understood in the words of cultural theorist Homi Bhabha quoted by Lippard in her book The Lure of the Local. ‘Remembering is never a quiet act of introspection. It is a painful re-membering, a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present.’

When Abandoned Clare was first proposed in 2009 rural Clare looked very different. The frenzied building developments, housing schemes and hotels, seemed to signify an obsession with shedding any reminder of the economic stagnation in the past. Now that the boom is over, the ‘Abandoned’ project, with its focus on the signs of rural abandonment could be read as a melancholic coda to the all-pervading litany of economic disaster. Yet behind the images lie stories, and within the stories are the germs of ideas and possibilities for the future, a kind of common sense that might serve as a generative catalyst for ideas on a sustainable future for rural communities.

Deirdre O’Mahony November 1st 2011

Thanks to Aíne Macken-Walshe and Phil Gaston.

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1 X-PO was established as an interstitial space enabling new connections and collaborative exchange between the various knowledge-making communities in the locality of Kilnaboy, Co Clare. For more information see http://www.x-po.ie


3 Paddy Cahir also had much of the oral knowledge of place, dinnseanchas, of the family relationships, place names and the stories of North Clare. Much of this knowledge has formed the basis of two group’s research at X-PO; the X-PO Mapping Group Research and the Rinnamona Research Group. For more information see http//www.x-po.ie and see Anne Byrne and O’Mahony, Deirdre, “Family and Community: (Re)Telling Our Own Story”, Family Relations Interdisciplinary Journal of Applied Family Studies. SAGE, Dec 2011.


The Old Schoolhouse, Kilnaboy, 7th August 2011.

The Shed Co-operative School, Roxton, 13 August 2010.

Overleaf: Miltown Malbay Housing Development, 10th June 2011.

The Old Schoolhouse, Kilnaboy, 7th August 2011.
The Shed Co-Operative School, Schoolroom and Studio, Roxton, 13 August 2010.

Convent School Classroom, Ennistymon, 15th August 2011.


Convent School, Ennistymon, 15th August 2011.
Toonagh House, Toonagh, 9th September 2011.

Micky Howard’s Bicycle and Electrical Repair Shop, Kilfenora, 9th June 2011.

Burren Coast Hotel, Ballyvaughan, 10th May 2011.

Overleaf: Lace Factory before demolition, Ennistymon, 18th April 2009.
Lace factory demolished, Ennistymon, 30th July 2011.

Mary Shop’s, Kilnaboy, 21st October, 2011.

Lace factory demolished, Ennistymon, 30th July 2011.

Mary Shop’s, Kilnaboy, 21st October, 2011.

Shop at the Creamery, Corofin, 28th September 2011.

Overleaf: Mushroom Co-operative, Tubber, 18th April, 2009.
Polytunnel, Mushroom Co-operative, Tubber, 11th September 2011.

Workers’ accommodation Mushroom Co-operative, Tubber, 11th September 2011.

Mushroom Co-operative, Tubber, 11th September 2011.

Mushroom Co-operative, Tubber, 11th September 2011.
House, Mullagh, 10th June 2011.


Ballyea Creamery, 1st August 2011.

Farm, Inagh, 2nd June 2011.
Paddy Cahir, workshop, Kilnaboy, 27th April 2011.

Paddy Cahir, stonemason and wheelwright, workshop, Kilnaboy 9th June 2011.

Overleaf: Barrie Cooke’s former home and studio, Kilnaboy, 2nd October 2011.

House, Kilkee, 6th August 2011.

Blacksmith, Ennistymon, 18th July 2011.

House, Kilkee, 6th August 2011.
DEIRDRE O’MAHONY
CURRICULUM VITAE

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Education
2005 – PhD Fine Art, University of Brighton, UK
2003-05 MA Fine Art, Crawford College, Cork, Ireland.
1976-79 BA (Hons) - St Martin’s School of Art, London, UK.

Public Art Projects
2007/8 X-PO Public Art Project Kilnaboy Co Clare Ireland.*
2006/7 Cross Land Public Art Commission Co Clare Ireland.*

Selected Solo Exhibitions
2011 Abridged 0 - 20: Abandoned Clare X-PO Co Clare.*
2009 re-presentations, Burren Collage of Art Gallery, Ireland.
2008 TULCA X-PO Publication Project Galway Ireland.*
2004 Bloom Tulca Visual Arts Festival, GMIT Cuan Mhuire, Galway.
2002 WALL Limerick City Gallery of Art.*
2001 WALL site-specific installation for the Context Gallery N. Ireland.*
2000 WRAP Lukacs Gallery, Fairfield University, CT., USA.
1997 ERRATICS, Limerick City Gallery of Art, Limerick, Context Gallery, Derry, Model Arts Centre, Sligo.
1996 ERRATICS Guinness Hopstore, Dublin.
ERRATIC Billboard. Public Art, Site-specific installation, Bryson St, Belfast, N. Ireland.

Selected Group Exhibitions from 2000
2008 10,000 to 50. Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin.*
2007 Local Local Siamsa Tire Gallery Tralee, Ireland.*
2006 Local Local Shifting Ground Conference and exhibition, gior Ennis.*
2005 Grace Garter Lane Arts Centre, Waterford, Ireland.*
Open EV+A 05 Curated Dan Cameron LCGA, Limerick.*
2004 Elipse Carlow Open, curated Peter Fitzgerald, Carlow, Ireland.
2003 Eire/Land, The McMullen Museum, Boston College, USA.*
EV+A (Reduced) Curated by Jeann Rohatyn Greenberg. LCGA, Limerick, Ireland.*
* Denotes Publication or Catalogue.
Awards/Residencies/Commissions.

2011 Project Funding for the Abridged 0 - 20: Abandoned Clare, from the Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaion.
University of Brighton Faculty of Arts and Architecture CRD Student Support Award.
2010 Visual Arts Bursary, the Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaion, Ireland.
2009 Clare County Council Arts Award Assistance Under the Arts Act Award.
2008 Project Award for X-PO SuperValu/Musgrave's Foods. Project Funding for the X-PO from the Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaion.
Clare County Arts Office Arts Award Assistance Under the Arts Act.
University of Brighton Faculty of Arts and Architecture CRD Student Support Award.
2007 Grizedale Arts Collaborative Research Residency, Grizedale, Cumbria UK.
2006 The Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaion Professional Development and Training Bursary.
2005 Residency Fellowship Áras Éananna, Innis Oirr, the Aran Islands.
Clare County Council, Residency Award Tyrone Guthrie Centre, Ireland.

Publications and Presentations:

2011 Family and Community: (Re)Telling Our Own Story Paper Co-Written with Dr Anne Byrne (NUIG) for Family Relations Interdisciplinary Journal of Applied Family Studies. SAGE. 2011
2005 Co-contributor with Anne Mulrooney, Tim Davis and John Langan Love Printed Project, Issue 05 Another Monumental Metaphor edited/curated by Alan Phelan.

Collections

Artworking, Ireland.
Office of Public Works State Collection, Ireland.
Clare County Council, Ireland
Limerick, City Gallery, Ireland.
University of Limerick, Ireland.
The Grange Museum, London, UK.

Teaching Positions

2007 - Lecturer Full-Time GMIT, Galway, Ireland.

What is Abridged?

Abridged aims to commission and publish contemporary/experimental poetry plus contemporary art freed from exhibition ties and especially commissioned for the magazine. We encourage poets/artists to investigate the articulation of Abridged themes. For example our last few issues have been concerned with Time, Absence, Magnolia and Nostalgia. These themes focus on contemporary concerns in a rapidly changing society. We are offering an alternative and complete integration of poetry, art and design. We experiment continually. We also stray into the exhibition format producing contemporary, innovative and challenging work accompanied by a free publication.

Why call it Abridged?

Because we are. You are. Everyone is. It also gives us a completeness to aspire to. People were rather dubious in regard to the name when we first unveiled it. However it’s become quite iconic and serves its purpose as we intended.

Who is Abridged?

At the moment Abridged is Gregory McCartney and Susanna Galbraith. However the make-up of Abridged is quite fluid and we have worked with various personnel over the years and no doubt will continue to do so. People come and go. The light still flashes.

How many issues of Abridged are there per year?

Generally there are three issues per year though this can increase with the addition of our exhibition publications and other project magazines.

Where can we get Abridged?

Abridged is generally available at art galleries and arts organisations in Belfast, Dublin, Derry, Galway. Usually for a limited period as they go very quickly. You can also download a free pdf of each issue on the Abridged website.

How long has Abridged been going?

Officially since 2004. We like to think there has always been Abridged people though.

Why is Abridged numbered as it is rather than dated with issue number as most other publications are?

We want Abridged to be timeless hence the lack of a date to condemn it to the archives. We ‘ahem’ borrowed Factory Records system of cataloguing and added a zero to signify abridgment.

Why are there gaps in the list of magazines/projects?

Abridged projects are numbered as they are conceived rather than born. Some (for various reasons) don’t make it to existence hence the gaps. We do on occasion revisit projects. For example Abandoned Dunguaire originated in 2007 but wasn’t born until 2010 therefore it has the 0 – 7 moniker.
Abridged is an art/poetry initiative. Publishes periodically. Exhibits occasionally. Based in Derry but operates everywhere. You can email us at abridged@ymail.com or write to us at Abridged c/o Verbal Arts Centre, Stable Lane and Mall Wall, Bishop Street Within, Derry BT48 6PU. Our website is www.abridgedonline.com Facebook page abridged zero-nineteen and Twitter @abridged030 has continually updated news also.

abridged 0 – 1: Emma Donaldson; Robert O’Connor; Janet Campbell; Colin Darke; Brian Fay; Alanstair Browne; Joe Duggan; Dave Duggan; James Lecky; Mark SaFranco; Matt Kirkham; Barbara Smith; Dave Kingham; Josie Muldowney; Howard Wright

abridged 0 – 2: Damaged Collateral George Bolster; Denzil Browne; Amanda Dunsmore; Fiona Larkin; James Lumsden; Sean Lynch; Theresa Nanigan; Ruth Rogers; Kimberley Montgomery; John McCartney; Conor McFeely; Errol Scott; Birgit Sallling Harsen; Paul Perry; Jonathan Baillie; Doris Rohr; Rachel Mooney; Louise Cherry; Gerald Dawe; Aisling Doherty

abridged 0 – 3: Romance and Assassination - Amanda Coogan; Breda Lynch; Gerald Dawe; Christine Callahan; Carolyn Monatara; Barry Hughes; Desmond Traynor; Grainne Finn; Shane Larkin; Damien Flood; Gwen Stevenson; Mike Haskell; Maria Campbell; Ian John Coughlan; Frank Sewell; Josie Muldowney; Dave Duggan; Joe Duggan

abridged 0 – 4: (An)other Irishman in New York New York Blog by Gregory McCartney. Can be accessed at: contextgalleries.blogspot.com

abridged 0 – 5: On the Cards Public Art Postcard Project featuring six Derry artists Helen Quigley; Ciaran O’Doherty; Pascale Steven; Colin Darke; Alice McCartney; Damien Duffy

abridged 0 – 6: Abandoned Donegal: Exhibition and publication featuring Denzil Browne, Maria Campbell and Declan Sheehan. Regional Cultural Centre, Letterkenny, Co. Donegal

abridged 0 – 7: Abandoned Donegal: Exhibition and publication featuring Denzil Browne, Maria Campbell and Declan Sheehan. Regional Cultural Centre, Letterkenny, Co. Donegal

abridged 0 – 11: Word on the Street - Maria Campbell/Conor McFeely, Maoliosa Boyle/Clionagh Boyle

abridged 0 – 12: I’d Step into the Light... Willie Doherty/Gregory McCartney

abridged 0 – 17: Time - Olive Broderick; George Shaw; Nuala Ni Chonchuir; Fiona Ni Mhaoluir; Gerald Dawe; Feargal O’Malley; Erin Rhoda; Kate Dempsey; Aiofe Mannix; Maria Campbell; Alyson Hallett; Colin Darke; Tinka Rechtz; Phillip Cymbie; Conor McFeely; Dominic Connet; Marie Connoit; Gregory McCartney; Lachy Morris; Patricia Byrne; David Mohan; Eileen Casey; John Hegley

abridged 0 – 18: Absence - Kathleen McCracken; Zoe Murdoch; Rhoda Twombly; Kim Montgomery; Gary Allen; Susan Kelly; John O’Rourke; Mark Roper; Lynda Tavakoli; Jenny Keane; Clare McCoter; Mairead Dunne; Peter Richards; Gerald Dawe; Olive Broderick; Libby Hart; Angela France; Maoliosa Boyle; Gearoid O’Brien

abridged 0 – 20: Abandoned Clare – Exhibition/Publication with Deirdre O’Mahony

Abridged Personnel:
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Editorial Assistant: Susanna Galbraith