



Deirdre O'Mahony, *Erratics*, 1995-1996. Acrylic Copolymer, pigment and limestone dust on unstretched canvases, dimensions variable.
All paintings courtesy the artist.

In 1991, the Office of Public Works (OPW) Ireland decided to build a large-scale interpretive centre in the Burren National Park near the base of a mountain Mullaghmore. For hundreds of years, the region attracted visitors, archaeologists, historians, artists, and many others for the wealth of monuments from early settlements and the diverse ecology of the limestone pavement. The OPW's construction plan for such a productive landscape soon triggered a major ecological conflict, initially at the local and later at the national and international level. At the time, the community of Mullaghmore was polarized. 'Born-in' locals supported OPW's decision, whereas the opposing group, led by Burren Action Group, many of whom were new residents, artists and environmentalists, opposed to the plan. The conflict raised questions of 'Who constitutes the community' and 'How to define belonging' that were articulated but not openly addressed during that period. After counter-protests of the groups and lengthy court battles which lasted more than ten years, the construction of the centre, which started in December 1992, was stopped and demolished.

When Deidre O'Mahony returned to Ireland in 1992 and settled in Kilnaboy, a parish four miles from Mullaghmore, she found herself in this active environment. As an 'outsider,' she desired to develop a deeper engagement with the contested space of Mullaghmore and the national park, so she started Artist-in-Schools residency in a local primary school. Her collective work in this programme introduced the eastern side of the mountain covered with erratic boulders, referred to locally as the 'Giants Playground.' The *Erratics* series came to life in this specific location and during this contested period. She used the long shadows cast by the boulders as a template on the unstretched canvases and filled the outlines with performative gestures in her studio.

Visiting O'Mahony's *Erratics* after twenty-five years with a new banner-like configuration, not only recalls the ecological conflict that damaged the dynamics within the community but it also reflects on the broader contemporary discussions on belonging, identification, and local and national political authority.