

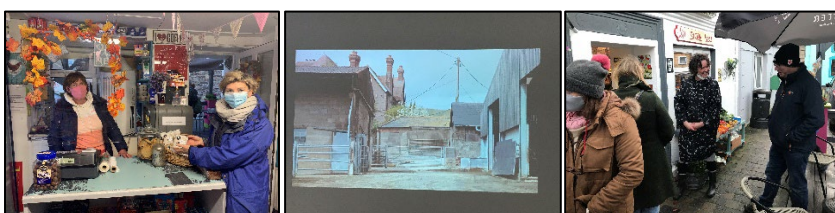


Ireland Scotland Bilateral Grant

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| Recipient name: | Dr Ciara Healy-Musson |
| Amount and year awarded: | £12,500 in 2021 |
| Title of project: | The Rural Reimagined: Connecting Irish and Scottish Artists and Writers with Rural Practices and Narratives |

Summary of project:

The objective of this project was to build, enrich and establish connections and new links between Irish and Scottish artists and writers, including selected members of four existing place-based research networks, whose creative practices focus on rurality. Funded by the Royal Irish Academy and the Royal Society of Edinburgh, this project has discussed and supported new methodologies for engaging diverse publics in their rural heritage as a means of increasing environmental awareness. This was achieved through discussion groups with NGOs and government organisations of both countries, two web-based fora, and two face-to-face practica in both countries, hopefully leading to future exhibitions and publications and several collaborative community projects now in discussion and planning stages. The project began with physical site visits to farms and rural heritage sites and group discussions, putting different constituencies in touch with each other and with supporting organisations and now facilitates a developing spectrum of interest across the arts in the complex value of rurality.





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Methodology used in conducting the research:

The methodology built on a ‘conversational’ approach predicated on holding two practica with a wide range of individuals from arts, rural interest groups and NGOs in both Ireland and Scotland. The information and orientations gathered from these then provided the basis for two moderated web-based fora, which initiated groupings and links intended to lead to further collaborative projects. These are emergent and cumulative projects, some with small groups of creatives working with discreet projects; others are now building towards larger actions assisted by the initial organisations (RIA, RSE and RHA), and building into more public presentations, exhibitions and publications. A lasting website continues to document ongoing projects, individual research, and links writers and artists with rural projects, groups and interested inhabitants.

Findings of research and milestones achieved:

In particular, the research gave agency to individuals with dual ‘identities’ not normally recognised by institutions and even local communities, to address rural issues (e.g. artist/beef farmer) and to network so as to support the bridging work of these individuals and a growing understanding within areas of the cultural sector of the value and importance of supporting arts initiatives that make such individuals’ work more widely available. Significantly, the face-to-face events took place immediately after the lifting of lockdown and provided opportunities for much needed in-person onsite interactions which embodied the need to address the complexities of the contexts in which participants were working.

In addressing these complexities, the issues addressed helped to galvanize the communities we worked with. These activities authorised a sense of urgency in relation to bringing the nuances of these issues to an urban audience – this is something that will unfold throughout March and April 2022, in particular at an exhibition symposium and ‘in conversation with’ events and the Royal Hibernian Academy, Dublin.

Additionally, there was strong enthusiasm expressed for crossing genres of support; for example, artists from Ireland working with farmers and Scottish writers, and Irish writers working with Scottish artists and environmental organisations. The specialist and expert knowledge from individuals’ support was overwhelming, and the desire was expressed to provide further assistance to creative projects and further interdisciplinary research. This came directly from members of various organisations: Scottish Environmental Protection Agency, Irish National Parks and Wildlife Services, Teagasc, the RSPB, NHS for rural healthcare delivery, the Scottish Gamekeepers Association, waste recycling groups, local councils etc.



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Dissemination of the project outcomes:

The results of the project have already been disseminated via our public website:

<https://www.theruralreimagined.com/about-1>

Further outcomes, information, opportunities and news will be disseminated in a number of ways:

1. Three papers (Healy Musson, Modeen and Biggs) will be presented as part of 'Alter Rurality 6 conference' in Thy/Aarhus, Denmark 20-23 May:
<http://www.arenaarchitecture.eu/news/alterrurality6-aarhus-thy-2022-may-20-23/>
2. A follow-up conference will take place at the Royal Hibernian Academy, Dublin on 9th of April, which will further explore the key themes that emerged during this research. (Healy Musson, Modeen)
3. An 'in conversation with' event will take place on 23rd March with three artists who were involved in this research project: <https://www.rhagallery.ie/events/maria-mckinney-anna-rackardand-katie-watchorn-in-conversation-with-writer-and-curator-ciarrahealy/>
4. Insights from the project have been fed by the consultant into a developing funded project in Wales – 'Narrating Rural Change' – coordinated by Professor Kirsti Bohata (Swansea University) and Dr Rowan O'Neill (SPAN ARTS) with the aim of creating a mutual feedback loop between the networks established by these two projects.
5. In progress: (Modeen) keynote presentation requested by and presented to a Japanese research group, on 'Social Inclusion and Applied Visual Research in the Field', 22 March 2022. Aspects of this research project will be included as part of this presentation.
6. A large group exhibition will be proposed to the Royal Scottish Academy for late 2025 or early 2026, accompanied by a book publication. The work in both the exhibition and writing in the book will be drawn from participants and issues resulting from this project, subject to further funding.
7. In 2025, Lismore Castle Arts will celebrate its 20th anniversary of operating as a national arts institution. Initial discussions are underway to develop/tour an exhibition and associated events to the gallery for that special year.
8. Rural Re-imagined is listed as a key stakeholder in a final report by consultant Ewan Allinson for Fáilte Ireland. The report is called Unlocking Rathcroghan's Potential Through a Place-Based Partnership and envisages a key role for the Rural Reimagined network in helping unlock the creativity of the Rathcroghan community as it makes more of the ancient royal site there to improve the area's socio-economic prospects.

Published work/plans:

In preparation: a Chapter in the forthcoming *Relate North: Everyday Extremes, 'Wetlands and Their Importance in Extreme Conditions'* (Modeen).



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In preparation: a catalogue essay: A Growing Enquiry Art and Agriculture Reconciling Values, for exhibition at Royal Hibernian Academy (Healy-Musson).

In preparation: Towards a relational understanding of self 'wilderness', and place: a case study (Biggs).

Forthcoming (February 2022): Open Rivers e-journal Issue 20, University of Minnesota Institute of Advanced Studies (Editor Modeen; contributor Healy-Musson).

Plans for furthering the project:

The interest and engagement in this research to date has been overwhelming. We plan to do the following with this project to develop it further:

1. Seek out and secure funding from Irish Arts Council/Scottish Arts Council or other funding bodies to develop an exhibition and accompanying publication of Irish and Scottish Visual Art essays on each of the artists by Irish and Scottish writers (Healy-Musson, Modeen, Biggs).
2. Build interest in the project amongst urban audiences through organising and facilitating a conference in the Royal Hibernian Academy, Dublin in April 2022 to accompany the exhibition of six female artists engaged in rural practices, titled A Growing Enquiry: Art, Agriculture, Reconciling Values (Healy-Musson, Modeen, Biggs).
3. Modeen will apply for an RSE Research Network award to continue this work.
4. Investigate possibilities of obtaining European Research Council funding to expand the network across with a partner network in the EU.

How the bursary enhanced professional development:

The grant enhanced the professional development in ten significant ways:

1. Invitations to disseminate information on the event at international conference (Denmark, Amsterdam, UK).
2. An invitation to develop a follow-up symposium at the RHA in Dublin (Healy-Musson).
3. An invitation to participate in an 'in conversation with' event on art and agriculture at the RHA (Healy-Musson).
4. An invitation to write an essay for the catalogue publication of: A Growing Enquiry: Art, Agriculture, reconciling values at the RHA (Healy-Musson).



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5. An invitation to work with Paul McAree, Curator of Lismore Castle Arts on Lismore Castle Arts 20th Anniversary exhibition in 2025 (Healy-Musson).
6. An invitation to design and contribute to an essay for artist Remco de Fouw's solo exhibition at the RHA (Healy-Musson).
7. An invitation to act as External Examiner for a PhD candidate addressing some of the key themes from this research at the University of Dundee in March 2022 (Healy-Musson).
8. The opportunity to apply for a position in UCC in the UCC Futures Radical Humanities Laboratory (Healy-Musson).
9. The opportunity to embed some of this research in a practical project with PhD researchers in art and writing in Scottish fieldwork, particularly with the assistance of Scottish Water, SEPA and The Binn Group Waste Management (Perth).
10. The project has incorporated three PhD students (one of which is fully funded by the Southeast Regional Development Fund as part of the development of the TUSEI at IT Carlow; the other two from the University of Dundee). This was professional training for their roles as researchers and significant in their development. It also enhanced their own research networks considerably – for example, one Scottish PhD candidate is now in the process of developing a network with Teagasc in Ireland. The practicum and website gave them and their work relevant public exposure.