

Art & Culture



COMPILED BY MARIA PEPPER

DOORS OPEN AT CRE

WEXFORD County Council has opened a massive creative space in the heart of Wexford town, bringing together a diverse collective of 25 artists, craft makers and performers under one convenient and sociable roof.

The Creative Hub at Cornmarket Mall has transformed a once-derelict shopping mall linking the Main Street with Mallin Street which lay dark and empty for years until it was bought and upgraded by businessman Eamonn Buttle of South East Radio.

The space was thrown open to artists as an experiment during last year's Opera Festival and the feedback from artists and the public was so positive that the County Council decided to take a three-year lease on the extensive premises.

The lack of affordable studio space for artists was among the issues highlighted

during consultations for the recently-published County Wexford Arts Plan and in making the Cornmarket building available, the local authority is attempting to address that vacuum.

The premises provides a supportive space for artists in which to work. 'People don't realise that it can be isolating for artists working in studios on their own', said County Arts Officer Liz Burns. 'It will be a mixture of working studio, exhibition and retail space for the creative sector in Wexford and a focus point for artists to meet, connect and work', said Liz.

Subsidised rents start at €100 a month rising to about €350 a month for the bigger units with light, heating and other utility bills paid by the local authority.

'We're also trying it out to see if we can link both sides of the town, from the Main Street to Mallin Street where you have the cultural spine incorporating the National Opera House, the Library, Wexford Arts Centre and Selskar Abbey', she said. 'The aim is to support local artists and craft makers and to generate a buzz in the area.'

The walkway through the mall will provide space for additional pop-up exhibitions and performances and is expected to come alive during Culture Night in September.

Wexford Craft Trail have taken over the biggest unit, called The Makers House, in which to sell their wares and hold demonstrations and workshops. Included are Patsy Flood O'Connor of Mad4Hats, Mairead Stafford of Ballyelland Pottery, printmaker Rebecca Homfray, Mairead Cairbre of Si-cháin Silks, sculptor Gilly Thomas, Annette Whelan Glass, Bianco Divito glass designer, Varna Studios and Padraic Parle furniture.

The resident visual artists include Helen Gaynor, Bernadette Doolan, Fran Greene, Ciaran Bowen and Ceri Ryan, Declan Cody, Olivia O'Leary and photographer Fergus Doyle, a lecturer in Fine Art at the Wexford School of Art and Design in Wexford Campus Carlow IT.

A group called the Wexford Art Hub led by gallery owner Denis Collins, which incorporates visual artists, writers and poets, has taken one of the larger units while an FDYS Youth Music Programme called Music Box will also be based in Cornmarket, catering



Bernadette Doolan with one of her artworks



The entrance to the craft trail studio, one of the units in the Creative Hub

for an additional 10 to 15 young people.

'There's a great feeling of support and positivity. It's going to be a happening place. It has been a vision of the Craft Trail that at some stage we would have a place in Wexford', said Mairead Stafford.

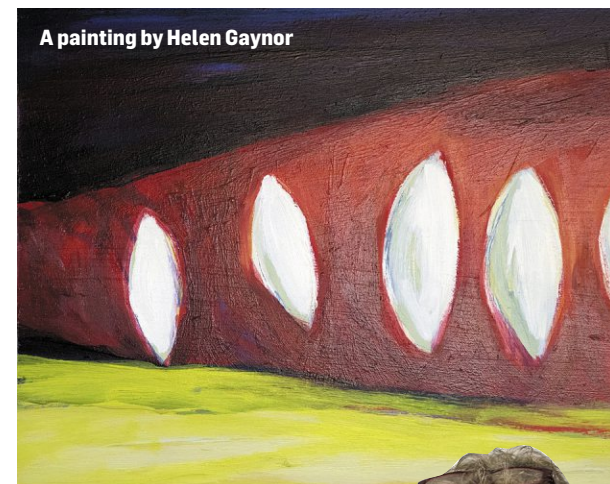
'I think it's a marvellous idea. It's very exciting for us. I hope it works because it would be nice to see it

continue', said artist and musician Helen Gaynor. 'It's lovely to be working in a new space. I'm really looking forward to doing a different kind of work.'

All the new tenants have signed a one-year lease. The premises will be managed by Wexford Arts Centre. The official opening will take place on Thursday, September 6 at 6pm.



Lina Varnelis from Varna Studio



A painting by Helen Gaynor



Stained glass by Bianca Divito



A work from Varna Studio



Artist Helen Gaynor