



Bernie Masterson

INVOCATION

Presented by Tallaght Community Arts

Bernie Masterson

INVOCATION

Preface by Tony Fegan

With an Introduction by Helen O'Donoghue

Tallaght Community Arts Dublin



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www.berniemasterson.com

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INVOCATION

INVOCATION - A potential space for reconciliation

TCA as a participatory arts organisation works with individual people and communities across South Dublin supporting each person to realise the potential of their own creativity, and to derive pleasure and wonder from their own artistic work and the way it can connect them to their peers or their wider community.

We continually seek to balance an active participation in the creative process with the opportunity for our participants to gain insight into the work of exceptional artists.

Bernie Masterson is one such artist. She combines the finesse of a professional life of an artist with a socially engaged practise via her teaching.

The idea that art can be an effective tool for social change is in itself still an unusual concept for many people.

However artists can be a catalyst for 'one of the hardest tasks of our modern and individualistic societies: to renew the link between community and individuals, by defining a new paradigm in which every individual feels responsible for the community and for 'the other.' ¹

Bernie's own art work occupies a space of extremely personal experiences. We presented Drawing on The Body here on the 10th of April 2010. This work actively explored the 'landscape ' of her mothers aging body with her mother Jeannie as an active participant and witness to the process. It had a huge resonance for our residents here in Tallaght and beyond.

When Bernie approached us in 2012 with the initial ideas for INVOCATION I realised that this was a rare opportunity for us to possibly contribute to the national debate on how we come to terms as individuals and as a society with the historical abuse of children sanctioned by church and state in the last century.

The exhibition encourages people to imagine a future that is distinct from the past. A sense of powerlessness is translated into a belief that 'I am' capable of making change.

INVOCATION quietly challenges and transforms traditional notions of self and community that historically prevented people from taking action on behalf of those who were suffering.

The small 'pilgrimage' between the the gallery and the oratory creates a opportunity to imagine a space for reconciliation. Charles Villa-Vicencio (National Research Director for the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission) intimately involved in the historic process following the collapse of apartheid warns against reducing the process of reconciliation to a neat set of rules.

"There are no simple, "how to" steps involved. It includes serendipity, imagination, risk and the exploration of what it means to "start again". It involves grace. It is a celebration of the human spirit. It is about making what seems impossible possible. It is about the complex business of real people engaging one another in the quest for life. It is an art rather than a science". 2

INVOCATION invites us to find an individual and collective response to imagine a new space where we do feel responsible for 'the other'.

Tony Fegan, Artist Director, Tallaght Community Arts.

Memory

As Ricoeur said,
To be removed from memory
is to die twice,
Nor should it be allowed
to make an amnesia
of violence.
An amnesty is enough
for the detail.
And who knows whether,
if in time,
such a healing is possible
as would make an evening
of forgiveness
worth the going on.
We make an affirmation.
The stuff of hope beckons.
Out of the darkness
we step,
and blink into the new light. 1

To be removed from memory is to die twice

In May 2014 the Tuam babies' story exploded across the world's press. In July, the Irish Government were before two hearings at the UN human rights committee in Geneva relating to what was described in the Irish Examiner as 'desperately inhumane practices' in relation to survivors of institutional abuses and this country's record in dealing with prisoners. 2 In August we read reports of the experiences of a number of the people for whom the state provides 'Direct Provision'.

While the world watches these stories unfold, we in Ireland feel that now all too familiar feeling of 'guilt by association'. Irish people of a certain age recoil at the memories of children whom we sat beside in our primary and secondary schools whom we now know were victims of church and state neglect; and many were victims of greater and horrific crimes perpetrated on children.

The artist/teacher Bernie Masterson is one of the people who has chosen to work very closely with the survivors of these crimes of neglect and more overt abuse supporting them through very painful periods in their lives.

In the 1980s I heard about an extraordinary art teacher working in the prison service. Since then I have had the privilege to meet Bernie and to write about her practice there as an educator for the Lifelines exhibition in 2004.³ Well known and greatly admired by educationalists as an artist/educator her practice is an example of what the educator and proponent of 'critical pedagogy', Henry A. Giroux describes as 'border pedagogy'.⁴ As an

adult educator in arts practice, Bernie's work in the prison service has a reputation for its high quality methodologies.⁵ Many public exhibitions of the work of the men she taught have elucidated this.

Also, as a trusted teacher Bernie has been entrusted with the men's confidences and has been a witness, a listener, for over 30 years to the deeply traumatic life stories of too many victims of state and church abuse in Irish society.

In May of this year Bernie invited me to see her most recent body of work which has emerged as a result of her working alongside of men who have ended up in prison.

The work in this exhibition has evolved from 'a personal response to the real life stories heard during the course of my involvement within the Irish Education Service'. '...some of the prisoners were adult victims of abuse who provided testimonies of their experience, documenting Church and State collusion in the operation of these institutions. They underscored the climate of secrecy and denial that permeated the Church's response when faced with controversial accusations...' 'These works are a personal response to their betrayal of trust.'⁶

As an artist Bernie is best known for her meditative landscapes. She has also produced a very emotionally imbued body of work that honoured her late mother's life and passing. This body of work follows in that genre- it is powerful and angry but in a subtle and sensitive manner that is evocative and reflects Bernie's nature.

On initial viewing of the video- *Invocation*, in Bernie's studio, I felt overcome by a chill, a

damp cold deep chill; resonating with my own past, our collective past of secrecy, conspiracy, and unspoken truths.

A single solitary flame floats in the centre of the screen; a second one appears on the left, soon joined by a third on the right...the Holy Trinity? These vulnerable flames of light stand in a deep pool of darkness. Flickering flames of liturgical candles in their brass holders, responding involuntarily to even the slightest movement of air, a breeze hidden in the overwhelming darkness.

When the flame in the centre dies, my attention focuses on the one to the left, which struggles to stay alight. This flame increases in a rush to survive, burning brighter, flickering, - then darkness. The final flame slowly dies in front of my eyes and then, the inevitable- I am plunged into blackness, so great, so overpowering. I suddenly become aware that there is no soundtrack and the darkness is all the more foreboding because of the silence. I think of that great line from the poem '...when the air inhales you' by Máighréad Medbh. 7

Remembrance continues the metaphor of liturgical candles and was filmed in the same location. This time rows of twenty or so are lighting in front of us; reminiscent of a school assembly of children waiting to have the annual photograph taken. This time the video has a soundtrack laid over the visuals which adds to the tension of the randomness of tiny fragile flames dying out in front of my eyes. The sound is of a beating heart, quickening its pace as more and more candles are extinguished, and the tremor of this heartbeat slowly fades (in defeat?) as the last flame struggles to survive and fails...

The final video piece **Shrine** moves its focus to the various markings left by children scratched into the surfaces of church pews. These appear abstract initially but soon names can be deciphered, children's attempts to leave their mark in these places of incarceration.

The soundtrack is ominously ambiguous and disturbing. The sounds do not seem to belong to the tones of a musical composition or to be the ambient sounds of mark making- rather they fight in a duel of actual and constructed dis-harmonies reflecting the images of letters etched into wood grain that could also be musical notation or old copy books from that time.

These works evoke memories of a Catholic childhood, the seduction of the church with all of its rituals, the aesthetic of light and darkness, a Chiaroscuro painting, stained glass windows with their saturated colours creating beams and prisms of light across walls and marble floors, uplifting promises of the 'afterlife'- a better place than here on earth.

The exotic nature of candles seldom seen in 1960s homes in a new world of electrification. The sounds of the coins spinning to a stop in the money slot. The smell of wax, burning wicks lighting amongst rows of others and the fascination of seeing the flaming candle. We offered up our sins to a God whom we hoped / believed was listening to us. We lived side by side with people who 'were less fortunate' than ourselves. The current revelation of the Tuam babies calls to mind that wherever we lived in Ireland, in bigger urban cities or in smaller market towns, we lived in fear of being one of those 'unfortunate children'. Not realising why. Not fully knowing, why? Children were not encouraged to ask questions. Questions were quenched quickly, as these flames are.

So-if innocent children who unknowingly witnessed abuse and bullying even if not the actual victims, were fearful, what of those equally innocent children who suffered state and church abuse? Many revelations since States of Fear have articulated these horrors. 8

As a witness to so many of the survivors stories how can an artist assimilate and process these horrors that were inflicted on innocent children and have left such indelible marks on the psyche and spirits of so many, too many, adults?

These are three works that will form a part of the forthcoming exhibition and will sit alongside a number of site specific installations including *Unseen Unheard*, *Grilles*, and *In a State of Grace* which all carry the legacy of Bernie's time working with the survivor's in her capacity as artist/educator.

Bernie Masterson is amongst a generation of artists who include Maggie Deignan, Mary Kelly, Brian Maguire, Paula Meehan, Mick O'Dea, who have worked in the prison service and whose work has contributed to the humanising of the individuals for whom society has often shunned and put away out of sight.

As an artist, Bernie is more publicly known as a painter of extraordinary, sublime landscapes, of paintings of the natural world that cause the viewer to pause, meditate and feel transported to spaces, real or imagined, of great beauty and other worldliness.

This work is a testament to many trusting relationships. The work bears witness to the fear and fragility of young innocent children who for decades were ignored and their stories unheard. The work reflects the deep empathy that Bernie feels for each individual and his story. The exhibition adds to her legacy, her life-long advocacy work through her relentless commitment in the art department in our prison service.

In the philosopher John Dewey's book, *Art as Experience*, he cites Van Gogh as saying that "emotions are so strong that one works without knowing that one works, and the strokes come with a sequence and coherence like that of words in a speech or letter."

'Such fullness of emotion and spontaneity of utterance come, however, only to those who have steeped themselves in experiences of objective situations; to those who have been long absorbed in observation of related material and whose imaginations have long been

occupied with reconstructing what they see and hear.’ 9

Bernie’s imagination has long been occupied with reconstructing what she has seen and heard. This body of work presents a coherent narrative, which moves us from a horror speaking to the dispossessed in all of us through a process of assimilation of these experiences and presents the possibility of transcendence. This work resonates with what M. D Higgins writes in the poem Memory. ‘To be removed from memory is to die twice.....

Bernie’s work calls on everyone to speak out against all injustice in society both past and present, we need to remember and to be remembered.

And on viewing this current body of work perhaps we can believe that -

‘The stuff of hope beckons.
Out of the darkness
we step,
and blink into the new light.’

Helen O’Donoghue
Senior Curator, Head of Education and Community Programmes, IMMA.

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Invocation - A potential space for reconciliation by Tony Fegan

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2. Villa-Vicencio, C. (2001) “Reconciliation as metaphor”. Retrieved from <http://www.ijr.org>

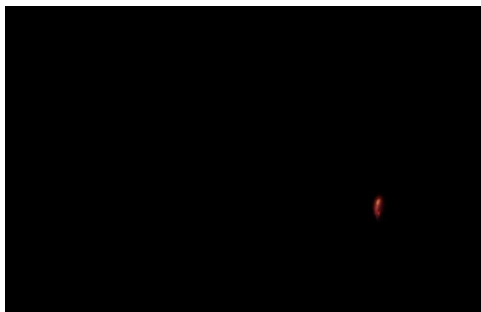
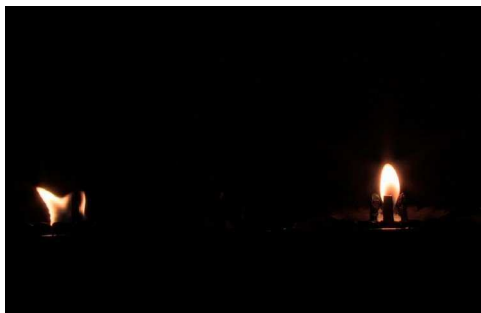
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1. Memory by Michael D Higgins, (p. 179), New and Selected Poems, Liberties Press 2011
2. © Irish Examiner Ltd. All rights reserved
3. Disturbing Pleasures, Giroux, (p.167) Routledge 1994
Giroux defines critical pedagogy as ‘a curricular space in which teachers and pupils interrogate and cross traditional boundaries (borders) of power, epistemology, decision - making, cultural and social representation in curricula, and in the process’
4. From Bernie Masterson’s notes on this body of work
5. Ibid in which teachers and pupils interrogate and cross traditional boundaries (borders) of power, epistemology, decision – making, cultural and social representation incurricula, and in the process.
6. 2009 Mary Rafferty’s documentary series States of Fear, was first broadcast on Radio Teilifís Éireann, 1999
7. When the air inhales you, from Unified Field, Máighr ad Medbh, (p.11) Arlen Press
9. Art as Experience, John Dewey, (p 75), Penguin 1980

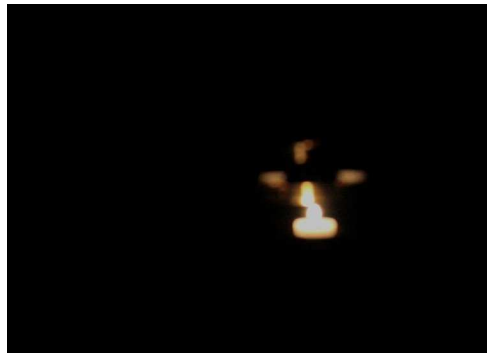
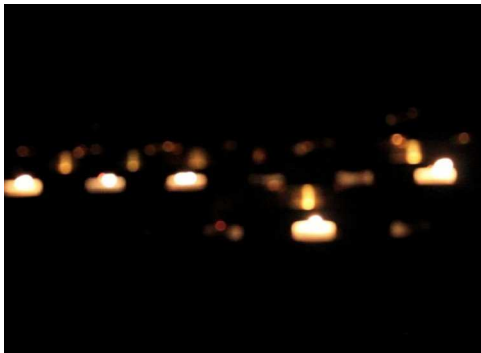
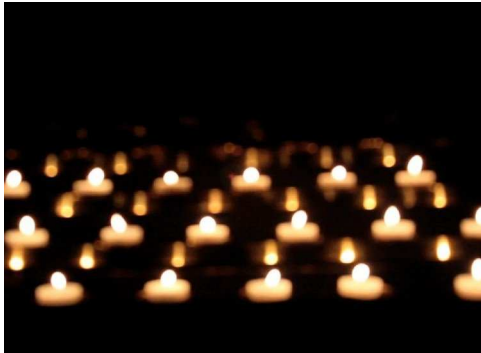
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A MULTI - MEDIA PROJECT

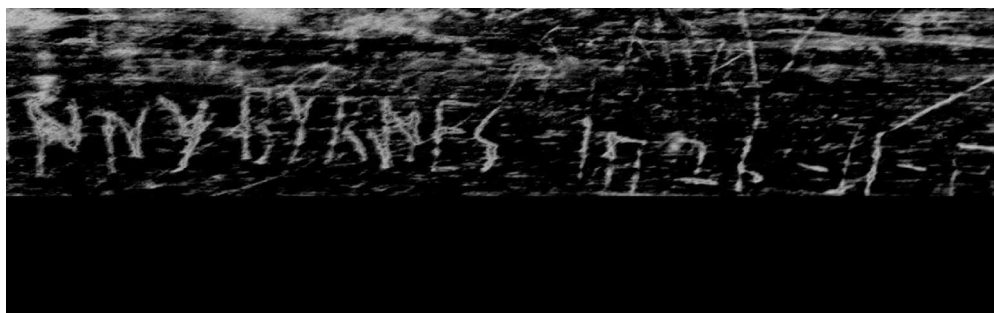
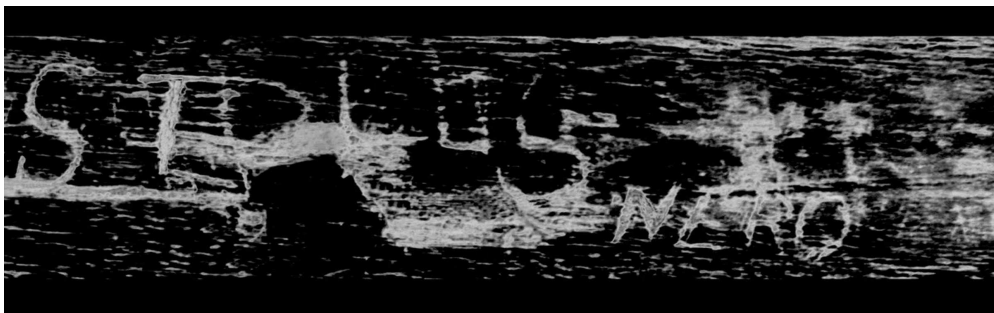
INVOCATION - 5 mins 12 secs - Video stills ©



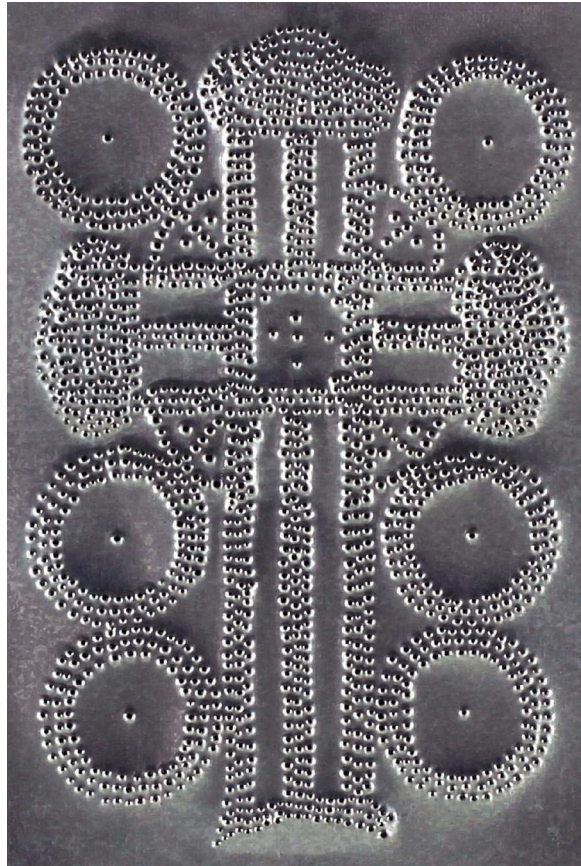
REMEMBRANCE - 3 mins 26 secs - Video stills ©



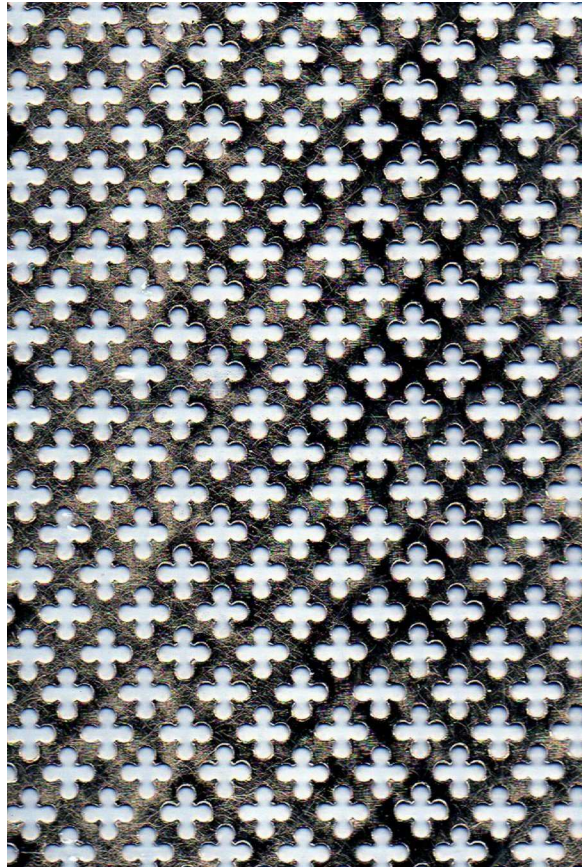
SHRINE - 3 mins 29 secs - Video stills ©



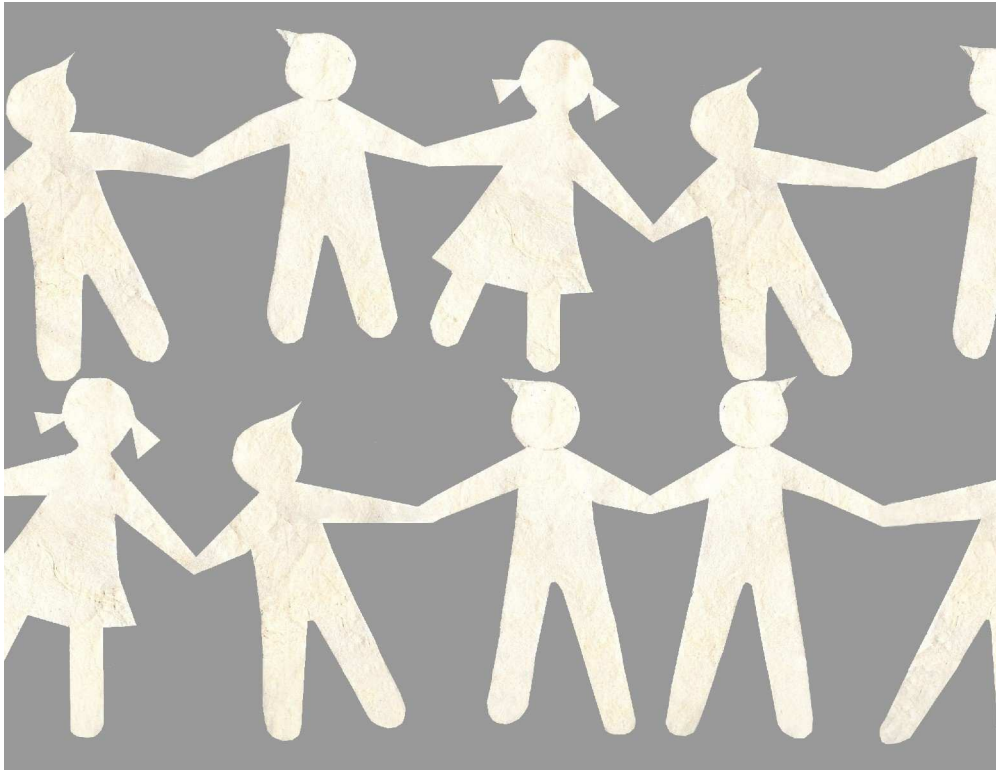
CONFESSIOAL GRILLE 1 - light box



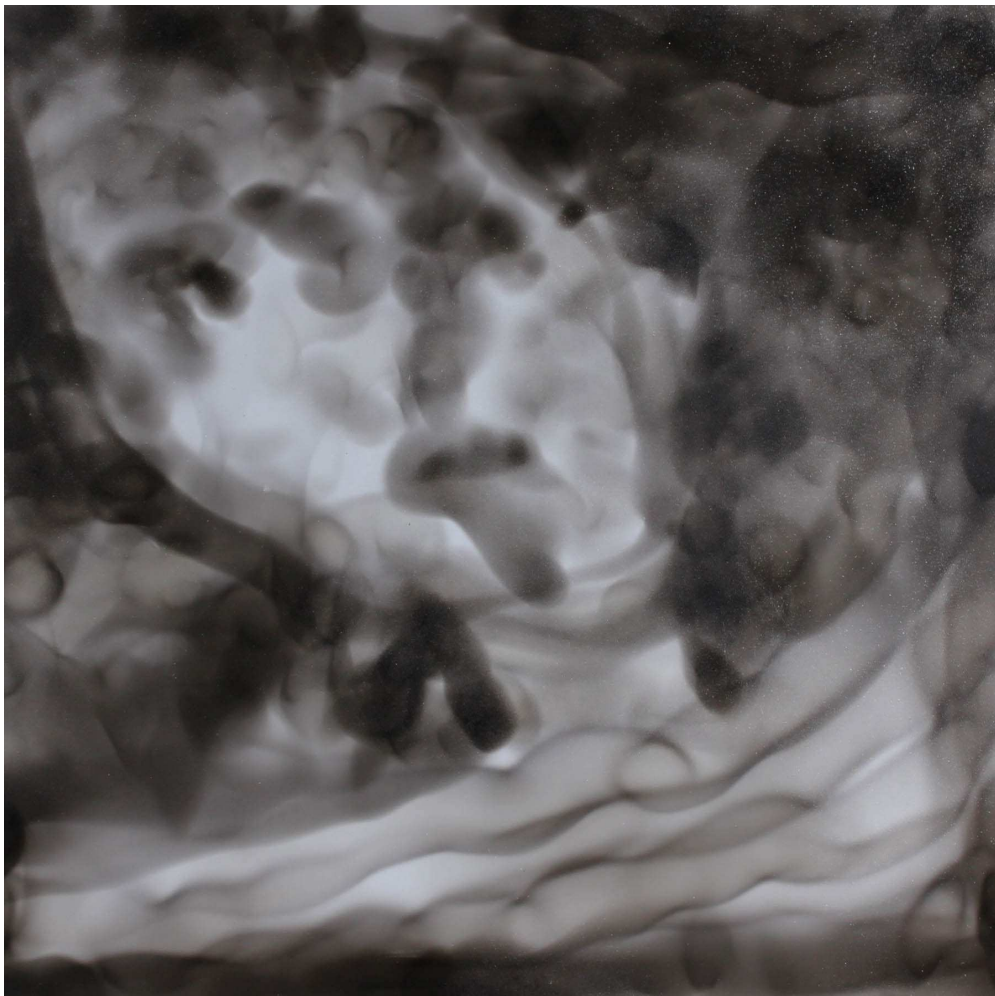
CONFESSIOAL GRILLE 11 - light box



IN A STATE OF GRACE - paper dolls installation - gallery wall ©



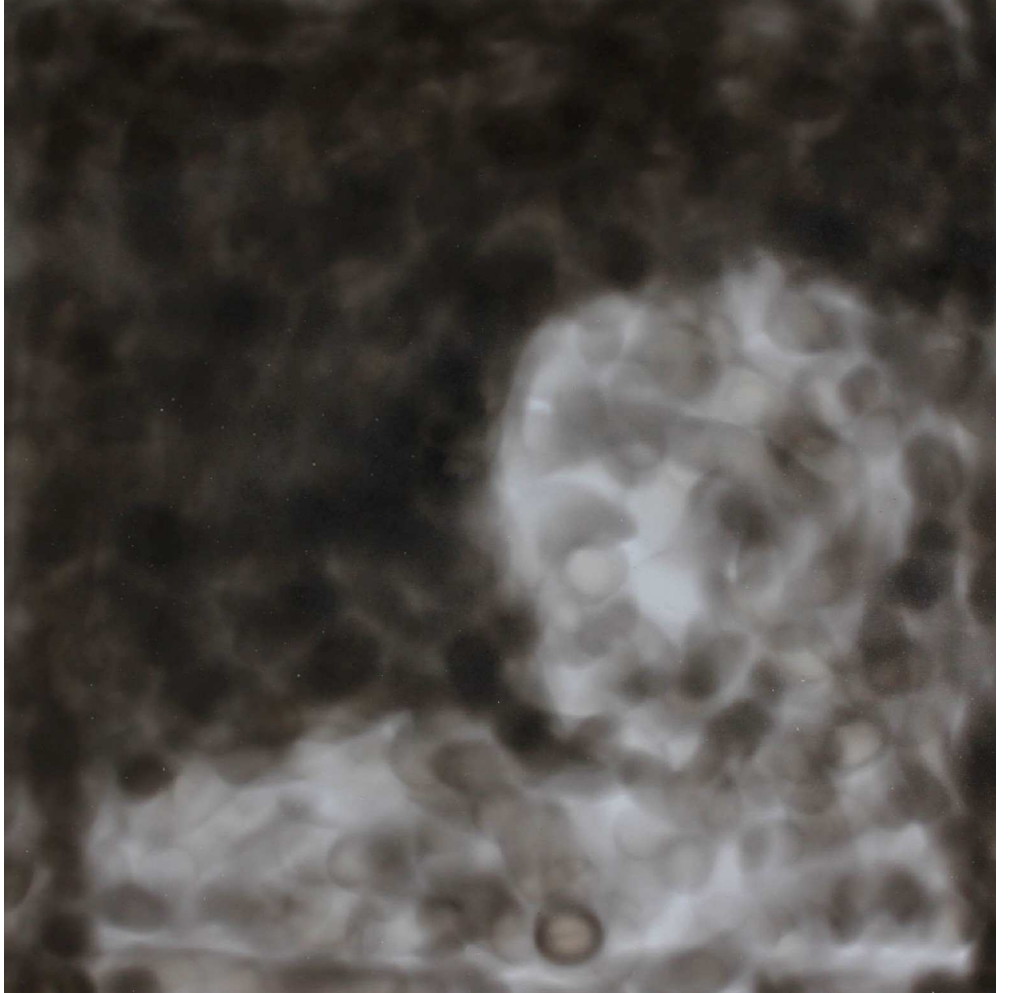
UNSEEN UNHEARD 1 - smoke drawing on white board - 35.5 X 35.5 cm ©



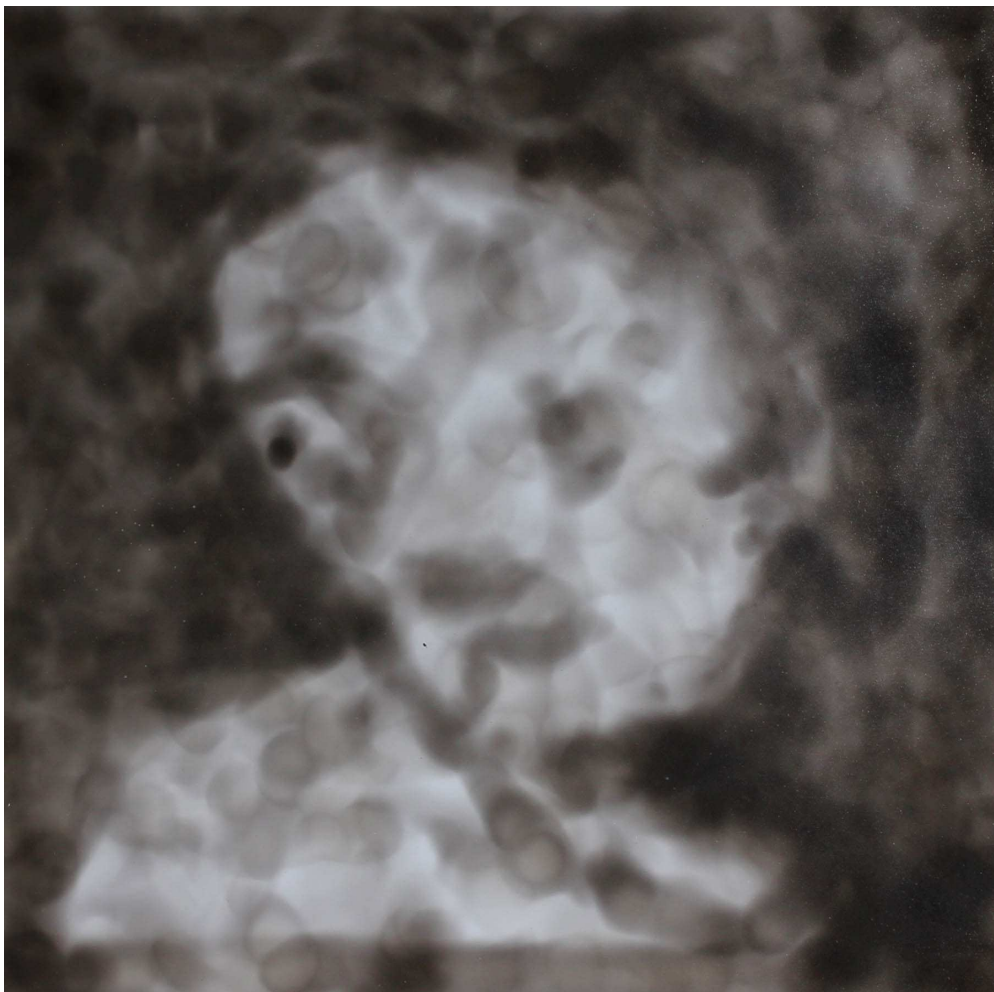
UNSEEN UNHEARD 11 - smoke drawing on white board - 35.5 X 35.5 cm ©



UNSEEN UNHEARD 111 - smoke drawing on white board - 35.5 X 35.5 cm ©



UNSEEN UNHEARD 1V - smoke drawing on white board - 35.5 X 35.5 cm ©



UNSEEN UNHEARD V - smoke drawing on white board - 35.5 X 35.5 cm ©



Biographical Details and Selected Exhibitions

Bernie Masterson was born in Ballymoney, Co. Antrim in 1958.
She lives and works in Dublin.

Studied

Limerick School of Art and Design 1981 – 1982

Limerick School of Art and Design 1975 – 1979

Solo Exhibitions

Invocation, Tallaght Community Arts, RUA RED Gallery, Tallaght, Dublin (2014)

Weather, Draiocht Art Centre, Blanchardstown, Dublin (2014)

Drawing on the Body Exhibition, University of Ulster, Northern Ireland (2011)

Paper by Maebh O Regan Ph.D. Symposium on Medicine and the Visual Arts, University of Ulster, Northern Ireland (2011)

Drawing on the Body, Waterford Healing Arts Trust (2011)

Living Landscape, Custom House Gallery, Westport (2011)

Drawing on the Body, Tallaght Community Arts, RUA RED Gallery, Tallaght, Dublin (2010)

Landscape & Memory, Clothworthy Museum, Co. Antrim (2005)

Landscape & Memory, Draiocht Art Centre, Blanchardstown, Dublin (2004)

An Engagement with Nature 1, Hallward Gallery, Dublin (2003)

An Odyssey, Kerry / Queensland Works, The Hunt Museum Gallery, Limerick (2002)

Two Painters, Rachel Kierans & Bernie Masterson Dun Aihirgin Gallery, Department of Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands, Dublin (2001)

A River of Images, The Dyehouse Gallery, Waterford (1997)

A River of Images, The Dolmen Gallery, Limerick (1997)

New Paintings, The Hallward Gallery, Dublin (1996)

Moods of a Landscape, The Dolmen Gallery, Limerick (1994)

Selected Group Shows

Fermanagh Visual Arts Open, Enniskillen (2014)
What a harvest, Waterford Healing Arts Trust (2012)
Ensemble, Nas Studio Group Show, Dublin 7 (2012)
Wish You Were Here, a Postcard Project, Nas 2/3 Mary's Abbey Dublin 7 (2012)
CultureFest, Link Exhibition Smithfield Dublin 7 (2012)
Rua Red Winter Open Submission, Tallaght Dublin 24 (2011)
Painting On Household Objects, The Higher Bridges Gallery, Enniskillen, Co Fermanagh (2011)
Miscellany, Culture Night Event, Nas, 2/3 Mary's Abbey, Dublin 7 (2011)
Level, Group Exhibition curated by Bernadette Madden Dunamaise Art Centre (2011)
Royal Hibernian Academy Annual Exhibition Dublin (2012, 11, 09, 08, 05, 04, 03)
Returning, Cill Rialaig Arts Centre (2011)
20/20 Vision, NAS, 2/3 Mary's Abbey, Dublin 7 (2010)
Xmas Exhibition Custom House Gallery, Westport (2010, 09)
Xmas Group Show, Cavehill Gallery, Belfast (2010, 09, 06, 05, 04)
1 Ft Square, Visual Arts Exhibition Higher Bridges Gallery, Enniskillen (2009)
Anna Cheyne Visual Art Award Exhibition, Lisburn Island Arts Centre, N. Ireland (2009)
Westport Arts Festival, Westport Co Mayo, Ireland (2009)
Hunt the Postcard at the Hunt, Museum, Limerick (2009, 06)
Dunamaise Open, Portlaoise, Ireland (2009)
126's How Do You Know show, Blankspace, Gallery, California, USA (2009)
Enniskillen Visual Arts Festival (2008)
Royal Ulster Academy Annual Exhibition, Belfast, Northern Ireland (2012, 2008, 2004)
Fenton Gallery, Christmas Exhibition, Cork (2007, 03)
Hallward Christmas Show, Merrion Square Dublin (2007, 06, 05, 04, 03, 02, 01, 99, 98, 97, 94)
Hallward Summer Show, Merrion Square Dublin (2007, 06, 05, 04, 03, 02, 01, 99, 98, 97, 94)
Utopia Fair, Eigse Carlow Arts Festival (2006)
Vivid Visions, selected artists from the Fingal County Council Collection (2006)
The Collection, 10 Ormond Quay Dublin, Mill Cove Gallery (2005)

Iontas, National Small Works Exhibition, Ireland (2005, 03, 98, 95)
Visuals, the British Embassy Merrion Road Dublin (2005)
Eigse, Carlow Arts Festival (2005, 03, 00)
Dialogues with Form, Canvanacor Gallery Lifford, Co Donegal (2005)
Boyle Arts Festival, Co. Roscommon (2004, 98, 95, 94)
Currents, Art of the State, Touring Exhibition Ireland (2004)
Wexford Opera Festival (2003)
Radharc, Draíocht Arts Centre, Blanchardstown Dublin (2003)
Four Painters, Gallery One, Kilkenny (2003)
Christmas Exhibition, the Dyehouse Gallery Waterford (2003)
The Winter Show, Dyehouse Gallery Waterford (2000)
Microsoft, September Exhibition (2000, 98)
Aer Rianta Gateway to Art, Dublin Airport (2000, 99, 97, 96, 95))
The Oireachtais Art Exhibition (1998)
The Hunt Museum Limerick (1998)
Omagh Art Auction, National Concert Hall Dublin (1998)
The Blackcombe Gallery, Cork (1998)
Green Thoughts, the Hallward Gallery Dublin (1997)
The Oireachtais Art Exhibition (1996)
The Dillon Gallery, Barnes London England (1996)
SIPTU Inaugural Exhibition, Ireland (1996)
Old Library Gallery, Cardiff Wales (1995)
The Portobello Open Exhibition, Tabernacle Gallery, London, Women's Art Festival (1995)
Monaghan Open Exhibition, Co. Mayo (1995)
The Second International Female Artist's Art Biennial, Stockholm Sweden (1995)
International Watercolour Exhibition, Treg'Aquarelle Tregastel France (1995, 94)
International Crossroads Symposium, Roscommon (1995)
Fe-mail Art Expo, Old Library Gallery Cardiff, Wales (1995)
Art '95, New York International Art Exhibition New York, USA (1995)

Cork Arts Festival (1994)
Claremorris Open Exhibition (1994)
Ashling, Exhibition Pantheon Gallery Dublin (1994)
Monaghan Open Exhibition, Ireland (1993)
Riverrun Gallery, Dublin (1992)

Corporate Collections

Smith, Kline and Beecham
New Market Partnership
Office of Public Works
Fitzgerald Insurance
Dept of Telecommunication & Regulation
Government Buildings
Tyrone Productions
Limerick County Council
Norkom Technology
Microsoft Ireland
Harcourt Development
Brian Hogan Architects
Stewarts Hospital, Palmerstown, Dublin
Department of Finance and Personnel, N. Ireland Civil Service
Fingal Council Council
Axa Insurance
Allied Irish Bank
Garda Headquarters
BBC Public Catalogue Foundation
Fintan Wallis Solicitors

Private collections in Ireland and abroad

Awards and Residencies

Awarded a fellowship from the Ballinglen Arts Foundation (2014)
The Tryone Guthrie Center, Annaghmakerrig, Co Monaghan (2012)
Invited Artist, Cill Rialaig Project, Ballinskellig, Co Kerry (2010)
Awarded Custom House Studio Residency, Westport, Co Mayo (2009)
Awarded a residency by the Heinrich Boll Association, Co Mayo(2008)
Artist in Prison Scheme, HOPE, Farranferris College, Cork (2007)
The Cill Rialaig Project, Ballinskelligs, Co Kerry (2006)
Nominated by the Hunt Museum for the AIB Award (2002)
The Cill Rialaig Project, Ballinskelligs, Co Kerry (2001)
The Tryone Guthrie Center, Annaghmakerrig, Co Monaghan (2000)
Arts Council of Ireland Artflight Award (1997)
The Tryone Guthrie Center, Annaghmakerrig, Co Monaghan (1996)
The Oireachtais, Douglas Hyde Gold Medal Award for Painting (1996)
The Cill Rialaig Project, Ballinskelligs, Co Kerry (1995)

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The Missing Heart in Group Art, Taispeantas Ealaine an Oireachtais, Guinness Hop Store, by Brian Fallon, The Irish Times, Section: Arts; Pg 12. 19 / 9 / 96
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Art of the State, OPW Catalogue, 1996, ISBN 0707623901
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Right Mix Of Many Styles, by Brian Fallon. The Irish Times: Section; Arts; Pg 12. 3 / 8 / 94
Varied art at Regional, by Isabel Healy, The Cork Examiner, 22 / 11 / 94
Magnificent Seven Show their artistry, The Cork Examiner: ArtFest 94; Pg 7. 15 / 11 / 94
Moods of a Landscape, by Marie Hobbins, Limerick Post, Pg 15. 6 / 8 / 94

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Landscape and Memory, circa on-line review by Brian Lynch, uploaded 30 / 1 / 2005
(http://www.recirca.com/cgi-bin/mysql/show_item.cgi?post_id=1863&type=reviews)

Broadcasts - Radio

Arena, Drawing on the Body interview with Jacqui Corcoran in association with Waterford Healing Arts Trust RTE Radio One 22 / 3 / 2011
The Arts Show, (International Crossroads Symposium Interview) RTE Radio One 1 / 8 / 95

Additional information

CDETB Educational Services to Prisons

Member of Visual Artists Ireland

Associate non resident member of the New Art Studio, 2 / 3 Mary's Abbey, Dublin 7

The artist Bernie Masterson and Tallaght Community Arts would like to thank the following:

Helen O'Donoghue, Senior Curator, Head of Education and Community Programmes IMMA, for her introduction essay to the work. To Maire Collins, Irish Member to the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors for agreeing to open the exhibition, and to Hugh McCarthy from RUA RED for his technical assistance. To Tadashi Kato for his origami lessons and to Mary Burke for assistance with photography.

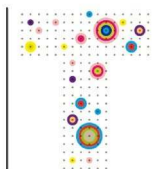
To those who gave permissions for filming and photographing at the various sites, especially Fr. John Sinnott and Pat Fleming, St. Kevins Church, Glencree.

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**Tallaght
Community
Arts**



