

Press Release

For Immediate Release

Wednesday 11th October, 2017

New Exhibition ‘Incarceration Altars’ Gives A Rare Glimpse into a World Hidden away from Society

“...man’s sentimental attachment to objects is one of life’s greatest consolations.”

Orhan Pamuk, *The Innocence of Objects*. (2012)

‘Incarceration Altars’, a collaboration between artist Bernie Masterson and residents of Mountjoy Prison Campus, investigates the relationship between person, place and object through a series of images and prisoners’ narratives.

The art project aims to contextualise the different worlds of prison identity and private identity. Objects provide links to those identities and are also used to reflect on other themes such as ‘mourning and memory,’ ‘transition and passage,’ ‘meditation and new vision,’ and how they serve as a marker in a significant life situation such as incarceration.

Masterson has been working with the project participants for several months now and the culmination of this work is to be exhibited in DIT Grangegorman in the form of an audio visual display of prisoners own testimonies. It is hoped that the exhibition may also tour around Ireland following this.

The exhibition will run from Thursday 12th October until Thursday 19th October. It is located in the Foyer of Rathdown House, DIT Grangegorman, Grangegorman Lower, Dublin 7.

Speaking about ‘Incarceration Altar’, the Chair of the Grangegorman Public Art Working Group, Prof. Ciarán Benson is quoted as saying -

“Being ‘inside’ is the euphemism for being in prison. Inside spaces are mostly small, enveloped, sometimes pushing against their walls, other times a refuge from all that is outside. What Bernie Masterson explores so astutely, and with such palpable sympathy and skilled restraint, in her ‘Incarceration Altars’ is how troubled – and sometimes troubling – people can fashion unique and deeply personal islands of meaning, fuelled by memory and imagination, from the tiny spaces to which they have been confined. In this memorable and moving project, she shows how self-in-space can visibly extend the person and create a humanised place, however spare.”

Speaking on behalf of the Irish Prison Service (IPS), Mr Kieran Moylan explains why the IPS gave support to this project.

He said “We recognise that creative activities can bring many benefits in a prison setting. They help people to cope with their sentence better, to express themselves in different ways and to develop new skills previously unknown to themselves and others. Creative activities also bring a great sense of achievement when the works are completed. This is evident from

the sense of accomplishment that exhibiting brings at our biennial National Exhibitions of Creative Arts produced by people in custody. We are delighted that Grangegorman Development Agency has chosen an installation by artist / teacher Bernie Masterson, on the theme of incarceration”

Incarceration Altars has been commissioned under Pathway2 (Round 3) of ‘...the lives we live’1, Grangegorman Public Art. This pathway aims to support community-based projects and events and to increase local participation and engagement with life through the arts. Projects are chosen through an open call and by an independent panel of assessors. For full information on all of the pathways go to www.ggda.ie/public_art.

Ends

Notes for Editors

Incarceration Altars has developed in four stages:

- Beginning with gathering source material, in the form of prisoners’ narratives, images and text through a series of one on one encounters with the artist.
- Selection and editing of material in collaboration with the project participants.
- The production of a catalogue with introductory essay by Professor Aislinn O Donnell who is the coordinator of structured Ph.D and M. Litt programmes in the Department of Education in Maynooth University.
- The conclusion of the work will consist of an installation situated in the foyer of Rathdown House on the DIT Grangegorman Campus with a view to possibly touring the work.

About the Artist: Bernie Masterson

Bernie Masterson comes from a painting background and has worked extensively with Educational Services to Prisons. Over the last few years her work has developed through a participatory art practice. It is interdisciplinary in nature, and sometimes collaborative. Key components of her practice include research, photography, drawing, painting, film, editing, and sound design.

In this collaborative exploration with the men from the Mountjoy Prison Campus she investigates new perspectives and makes us question our assumptions, in relation to negative stereotypes. She seeks to find alternative points of view that raises questions and promotes critical dialogue, regarding the role of humanity, as individuals, and as communities. Her work evolves as a personal response to real-life stories and situations encountered.

‘...the lives we live’1 – The Grangegorman Public Art Programme

The Grangegorman Development Agency (GDA) is the statutory body set up in 2006 under the GDA Act 2005 and is responsible for the re-development of the 73 acre Grangegorman

site into a new urban quarter in Dublin 7 with health, education and community at its heart. Further information can be found at www.ggda.ie

In 2011, the GDA commissioned the Grangegorman Arts Strategy and the subsequent establishment of the Grangegorman Public Art Working Group (PAWG) to oversee the implementation of the Art Strategy.

The Partners : The Irish Prison Service & the CDET

The Irish Prison Service operates as an executive agency within the Department of Justice and Equality with responsibility for 14 institutions, consisting of 11 traditional “closed” institutions, and two open centres. Their mission is to provide safe and secure custody, dignity of care and rehabilitation to prisoners for safer communities. Prison Education consists of a partnership between the Irish Prison Service and a range of educational agencies from the community, particularly local Educational Training Boards, the Open University and Public Library Services. Other agencies such as third level colleges and the Arts Council are also involved in education provision.

1: Extract from 'Dreams of a Summer Night', New Collected Poems (2011), by kind permission of the author, Derek Mahon, and The Gallery Press.

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