

# Altered Images

**South Tipperary County Council  
Mayo County Council  
Irish Museum of Modern Art**

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# Introduction

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A partnership initiative of Mayo County Council Arts Office, South Tipperary Arts Service and the Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA), **Altered Images** is an exhibition of artworks from the collections of all three organisations. Accessible, interactive and inclusive in ethos, the exhibition aims to stimulate engagement with the visual arts for the general public and particularly for disabled people. The idea that a visual art exhibition should be accessible to all who choose to visit it is not a new one; most national museums and galleries have an access programme that enables people with disabilities to experience selected artworks through various multi-sensory devices and through dedicated education and outreach programmes. However, the idea of collating an entire exhibition with an emphasis on accessibility in a multi-dimensional way is relatively new in Ireland.

Arising from previous work done by Damien O'Connor, **Altered Images** came about through collaboration of the three partner organisations whose aims were to further enhance the viewing experience of the spectator – to introduce new ways of seeing and experiencing art, for both disabled and non-disabled people alike. The three partner organisations hope that through this exhibition people will engage with the works on display to a higher degree, experiencing them with more intensity through the tactility of relief models, listening to the audio and artists' descriptions and viewing the sign language interpretation by artist Amanda Coogan.

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This is a touring exhibition, starting at the County Museum in Clonmel, County Tipperary, moving to Ballina Arts Centre in County Mayo and finally to the Irish Museum of Modern Art in Dublin. The exhibition works on many levels. Firstly, curatorial decisions were taken in selecting to ensure a cohesive body of work. The selected works all make reference to classical or art historical sources in either the method of depiction or their subject matter. While each of the partners has very different collections in terms of capacity and the period of time they have been collecting, it was agreed at the outset that each would be represented equally. The exhibition also includes new works by Daphne Wright and Amanda Coogan that were commissioned specifically for the project.

The scale of the exhibition was determined by available resources, as it was decided early on that each artwork would need to be accompanied by a multi-sensory display in order to provide meaningful access. Each work has an audio description, available on an MP3 player. These were produced by Anne Hornsby, and also contain the artists' and curators' descriptions. A relief model, interpreted by Loz Simpson of Topografik, is also available beside each artwork. In addition, artist Amanda Coogan was commissioned to produce an interpretative sign-language representation of the exhibition in the form of a filmed performance.

An audio CD and Braille version of the large-print exhibition catalogue is available on request.

Sign language tours are available by arrangement and an accessible website for the project can be found at [www.alteredimages.ie](http://www.alteredimages.ie). An important part of the project is the education and access programme at each exhibition venue: facilitators and artists will present talks and workshops. Information regarding the education programmes for each exhibition is available through the website link [www.alteredimages.ie](http://www.alteredimages.ie).

All of the partner organisations have learnt a great deal from putting this challenging exhibition together. Practical issues included delivering disability equality training to all the gallery, museum and relevant staff of each organisation, accessible venues, suitable materials, means of displaying the work, scale, communication with target audiences. Yet we still have a lot to learn and while we have attempted to provide an accessible experience of the visual arts we certainly would not claim to have all the answers; we see this process as the opening up of a discussion for future possibilities in terms of accessibility and the arts, both physically and notionally.

In delivering this exhibition we are indebted to the artists involved for their generosity and openness in undertaking this journey with us. Without their gracious co-operation this exhibition would not have been possible.

We are also indebted to Damien O'Connor for his vision and endless patience in guiding us.

**Partner Organisations**  
Irish Museum of Modern Art,  
Mayo County Council,  
South Tipperary County Council

**Project team**  
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Mayo County Council

Sally O'Leary, Arts Officer,  
South Tipperary County Council

**Curators**  
Johanne Mullan and Sally O'Leary

# Past Context Future Direction

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I have seen a wide range of approaches employed to make visual art accessible to people with disabilities – be it as a visually impaired person, a tactile and visual artist or as director of a national arts and disability organisation. For me, this has ranged from specially created ‘touch’ exhibitions of new work to the interpretation in low relief and audio recordings describing selected works from existing collections. While these experiences have extended my knowledge over the last three decades, what I’ve sought most are ways of accessing the richness and breadth of form and concepts of what the visual arts has to offer, to dip in and out of what interests and engages me in the way most non-disabled people who have an interest in the arts can. As an artist, I find the works of other artists past and present are like a library of images and concepts to immerse myself in and draw from. But as a visually impaired person I can’t help feeling that over the years I’ve mostly had access to the ‘returns trolley’ rather than the entire library!

However, in general the exhibitions I really want to see are the ones where no attempts are made to address the access requirements of the audience at all. For me this can mean a combination of the following: can’t find the gallery because the name is indistinguishable from the façade of the building; can’t read the brochure or exhibition catalogue because the print is too small or the light too low; can’t read the labels – which is particularly confusing in a group exhibition as, besides a visual appreciation, associating the correct work

with the artists is a rather hit and miss affair. Although it could be said that in a world that is obsessed with the cult of personality and what is in fashion, a visual response that is based on what you see, rather than who it is by, is positively honest. But it is so often a momentary experience with a narrow incomplete context. Consequently, I tend to go to exhibitions with other people. However, that doesn’t always negate my own access requirements. I remember a while back attending the opening of a photography exhibition with a wheelchair-using friend and finding that, in order for both of us to see it, we had to assume the roles of alternating PAs – I assisted my friend up steps or through narrow doorways and she read the labels to me. While we made the exhibition accessible to each other, the experience was exhausting!

As an artist, one of the questions I’ve struggled with over the years is – who inspires me? I’ve observed that many of my disabled peers struggle to answer that question too. Or is it that we feel uncomfortable at the response we very often want to give – ‘myself!’ It might be honest but is it wise? Am I asserting that the broader critical discourse is irrelevant or, worse still, that I don’t understand it at all? Why I think like this has intrigued and perplexed me. On reflection, I believe it is probably down to the way I often experience the visual arts, soaking up what’s available to me, rather than always being able to take in the whole context. Or, put more directly, inadequate access can prevent a complete in-depth analysis and informed filtering from taking place at

the same time. Of course there are other issues of cultural relevance in terms of identifying one's own experience in the visual arts which need to be taken into account as well. However, none of these observations should be interpreted as the disabled audience or artist being introspective through choice but rather as a result of circumstances where what's available to engage with in the visual arts has been a pale impression of the whole picture.

What's obvious from this snapshot of my personal experience of visiting exhibitions is that issues of access stretch from the basic to the very complex, from the nominal cost to significant capital investment. But most of all, what I hope it illustrates is how central good access is to giving a disabled audience a complete and dynamic experience of the visual arts. What makes **Altered Images** an advance on what has gone before in an Irish context is the curation of a whole exhibition that has a multi-sensory approach to access, thus having an inclusive appeal that will reach the widest audience possible. While in my reflections I have concentrated predominantly on my access requirements as a visually impaired person, **Altered Images** intends to provide access solutions that are cross-impairment while simultaneously creating an exhibition equally interesting and accessible to a non-disabled audience, and consequently encouraging disabled people and their families and friends to come and explore the exhibition together. Furthermore, it will, for example, allow people who are blind or deaf to explore the conceptual nature of visual art alongside non-disabled people.

Exhibitions such as **Altered Images** will not only raise the expectations of audiences but assist in setting standards for a wider more inclusive approach to access in the future. Although it may not be practical for every gallery or museum to implement a similar multi-sensory approach to interpretation in its entirety, it will serve to illustrate the broader creative range of solutions available as well as contributing to a deepening of the debate on access in Irish visual arts. So, to a greater extent than most, this is an opportunity for curators and gallery managers to assess their approaches to access and see what can be implemented in the coming years. Obviously they may argue that there are limitations in terms of funding and physical space. However, the starting point is a more inclusive vision for the future. It is only then that audiences, curators and gallery managers will know what to ask!

Pádraig Naughton,  
Director, Arts & Disability Ireland

# The Organisation of Hope

## many tiny empowerments

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**‘In looking there is always something which is not seen, not because it is perceived as missing... but because it does not belong to the visible.’ (I)**

**Victor Burgin**

In a new film work by Daphne Wright, she has taken a small Rococo sculpture as the starting point. Her film is about memory or, rather, loss of memory. The translucence of the white marble is retained in the crystal image, but the little grouping of figures is lost in the fragmented form of her work. Their story is hidden from us so only glimpses are revealed – the edges of fabric, the muscle of a body, the texture of rocky cloud. Isolated elements, cut off from their original source, reveal an entirely new formation made from close-ups and slow pans, gaps and ellipses. Here any sensory-motor links that direct a narrative are dissolved and become, in Deleuzian terms, **‘a pure optical and aural image’** (II). In the soundtrack, Wright uses the voices of two elderly people, one male and one female, using phonetics to create a particular emotional presence. Incomplete sounds over incomplete images. The junction between image and sound is reinforced strangeness, like shards of left-over memory, pieces lodged deep in the unconscious mind that come to the surface as drifting slivers out of the vague territories of forgetfulness – the barely recognisable, dislocated moments frustrated in isolation. **‘Common sense tells us that memory itself is a sort of space,’** writes Brian Dillon; **‘that it works best when we grasp for objects or pictures**

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**rather than words’** (III). What we remember best is perhaps how things feel, what we experienced. In Daphne Wright’s film, memory is made distant and appears as nearly lost. The sensuality of carved flesh, the ache of love’s desire are denied to us through cinematic device and the near abstraction of images, the dissonance of unformed words. **‘Evidently a different nature opens itself to the camera than opens to the naked eye’** (IV) wrote Walter Benjamin and what filters through Wright’s beautifully composed, melancholic film is a consciously empathetic exploration of an ageing mind, where the struggle for knowledge and memories are no longer attainable and have become opaque, tortured and frustrated.

**Altered Images** presents a different kind of exhibition. From the start the small group of artworks selected out of local (South Tipperary and Mayo County Councils) and national (IMMA) collections, and including the new film work by Daphne Wright, and a newly commissioned work **Seven Steps** by Amanda Coogan, was assembled together with the intention of connecting with universal audiences – those who cannot see, those who cannot hear, audiences whose physical movements are impaired, the uninitiated, the inhibited alongside the ‘regular’ exhibition-goer, well experienced in the ritual of looking at art.

The task that the curators set themselves is considerable. First, there is the question of which artworks to select and how such a choice might

support a coherent grouping which is collectively and individually open to the levels of translation required. There is a further question about what might be lost or, maybe worse still, embellished and distorted in such translations. Meanings have become ambiguous, open-ended and are seldom fixed in contemporary works of art – each viewer or participant's response is valid in itself, as is the broader cultural context beyond the frame of the image, and there is always the **untranslatable** present in the work itself. If the interpretation and mediation tools used are blunt, overloaded or too literal, or the exhibition is considered only in terms of a limited or specific audience requirements, might such a courageous and genuine endeavour be watered-down and weakened?

The desire to make visual art exhibitions accessible to all who might wish to visit is now an ambition of all major museums and galleries – with multi-sensory devices and outreach and educational programmes grounded in policy and a cultural ethos often supported by designated departments. The curation of an entire exhibition with a primary emphasis on accessibility in a multi-dimensional way is, as the project team writes in their introductory text, 'relatively new in Ireland'. The slow curatorial process of the curators Sally O'Leary and Johanne Mullan along with the project team members Anne McCarthy, Damien O'Connor and Georgie Thompson, has been one of experimentation and learning – building on existing bodies of knowledge and methodologies with openness to new thinking.

What has challenged the curators from the start is the need to think from different perspectives simultaneously and still remain alert to the fact that this is an experiment of sorts, one that places accessibility at its core and which might not work out in every way intended – as such the exhibition itself will be foremost a place of learning, a testing ground. What is crucial here in the breaking down of exclusory zones in the arts – the shutting out of audiences who for one reason or another do not or cannot cross such territories – is the call for inventive ways of connecting audiences to the artworks through facilitation on several sensory and cognitive levels – touching, listening, hearing, imagining, feeling, seeing, navigating, experiencing. This exhibition, however, is not about dismantling the 'institution of display' or the concept of exhibition; the tools and methodologies used are designed to align with and support conventional experiences of visiting an exhibition – by overcoming gaps, real and perceived obstacles, which open out experiences and allow others in. And yet, what may prove so groundbreaking about this exhibition might be found not only in its primary agenda but rather, in focusing on the experiential needs of different audiences, an unexpected subplot unfolds, and we might begin to consider that the visual arts do not exclusively belong to the visual – that they do not operate only at optic levels. Seeing transcends sight. A fluid interrelationship between our senses forms (in) tangible connections between our external and internal beings – between body and mind, between how we experience and how we think and between memory,

imagination, knowledge, perception and distortion. It suggests the possibility of internal eyes, internal ears, the kind of consciousness ready-made for dreaming, for daydreaming, imagining, perceiving, remembering. Fiercely acute senses combining and compensating for loss are fluid, intertwined, emancipated. I think of the blind who echo-locate to navigate space, clicking their mouths to interpret soundwaves of nearby objects, **‘Visibility repeated in the body by secret visibility’** writes Merleau-Ponty. **‘Nature on the inside’**, says Cezanne. (V)

**Altered Images** is an exhibition that works against the hegemony of the eye and challenges, as Suzi Gablik would ask, **‘the vision-centred paradigm by presuming the spectatorial distance of the audience and by empower[ment]’**.(VI) This is in an accord with the phenomenologists who demand receptivity to the full ontological potential of human experience and for a heightened receptivity of all senses. The curators’ emphasis is on the deeper interpretative dimensions of their audiences and through their chosen artworks they cleverly make a double play on this ambition.

The selected works are chosen out of their respective collections and reference in different ways a lineage of image-making from the art historical – iconic masterpieces, genre painting, Rococo, Classicism, the Romantic and the Gothic – to popular culture’s repertoire such as Disney, comicbooks and fairytales. The artists’ appropriation of such material represents

something familiar and perhaps already known to us, but which through subversive re-configurations carries new meanings relevant to aesthetic, cultural and political issues of today. They are each in themselves altered images.

There is something so thoroughly considered in the work of Abigail O’Brien. Precise, poised, domestic. Her photographs often hint at 17th-century Dutch interiors, with their elegant rooms of refined taste, where women write letters, read and sew. A bourgeois lifestyle, wealthy and ordered – these are perfected worlds trapped in photography. But in O’Brien’s work a darker shadow seeps through the narrative, leaving us at uncomfortable thresholds. **The Last Supper** is part of her series based on the Seven Sacraments and was inspired by French artist Nicolas Poussin who painted a similar series between 1637 and 1647. It consists of a large-scale installation of seven Cibachrome prints, a long dining table with immaculately embroidered tablecloth and a solitary place setting. Marriage is the focus here and the eve of the ceremony is an occasion for gifts and feasting. A cosy female world is in preparation. Portrait groupings of women emerging out of dark backgrounds to take part in these sumptuous scenes appeal to our faculty of desire, our need to play a part in the rituals of living. They have a feel of early Caravaggio. But the solitary place setting and the two empty chairs in the centre panel suggest something unresolved. O’Brien’s use of religious ritual is an effective vehicle to explore everyday complexities where an

orderliness of ritual conceals a discord underlying the messiness that is at the root of living. The clues made present in the work operate symbolically only to support that which is absent and missing, to add a certain mystery, an air of foreboding.

If Abigail O'Brien draws on art historical references and religious ritual to represent such unresolved tensions within everyday living, Thomas Brezing's paintings draw on fairytales, Disney characters, graphic images of circuses and the carnivalesque, presenting seemingly innocent worlds with ominous and threatening undercurrents. His themes confront major issues – globalisation, pollution, the environment, migration, feelings of displacement, of cultural homelessness – and he tackles dark subjects that are close to the bone, personal histories that reckon with the burden of responsibility. Lucy Cotter has written eloquently of his work and its cathartic impulse – of Brezing's ability to **'bring repressed feelings and fears to consciousness'**. (VII) Here a sort of mania imbues these magnificently patterned worlds – **Did Germany put the sun there?** – a silhouette of shadows and tumbling acrobats. His aesthetic is clearly lodged within the German tradition of German Expressionist painting, medieval woodblock prints, Romanticism, Paul Klee and the fairytales into which he bravely fuses cartoon-colour from Disney's palette. And yet, within such pretty colour and highly aesthetic surface patterning, Brezing's saturated scenes speak of darker realities. They are in ways like the work of African-American artist Kara

Walker, who uses the silhouette as a narrative device for the telling of histories too gruesome for other formats. Brezing's work has, as Aidan Dunne writes, a **'wintry feel'**. (VIII)

Fairytales and children's stories are points of departure for Alice Maher's recent body of work, as is Greek classicism and Roman wall paintings like those found in Pompeii. Her prints and drawings combine an elegant lyricism, enchanted medieval sophistication with the strange and surreal territories of dreams or of a Gothic sublime. **The Snail Chronicles** are a series of prints made from plates combining her drawings with the coloured-liquid trails left at night by snails that have been fed a diet of vegetable dye. The snail, for Maher, is near to perfect – a tiny creature **'with its perfect world and its home and its soft body fitting perfectly inside'**. (IX) Maher's prints are expressionistic yet spare fragments of stories. Images from a hybrid world, part planted in the earth and nature and partly belonging to other worlds, taking us to the other side, in through swirls of nebulae. A fever bush springs from a boy's sickbed as a cluster of trees. Above is a threatening sky. The burning fever is a torrid outside of the sleeping child, like Goya's monsters. Yet his stillness suggests calmness unperturbed. It is not, perhaps, his visions that produce monsters, but ours. The world is full of apparitions. The object, as James Elkins writes, stares back at us: **'it performs in response to what I imagine... it is full of eyes'**. (X)

The juxtaposing of Caroline McCarthy's magnificent still-life with its opulent display of fruits, cabbages, large marrows, half-peeled oranges and spilt drinks suggests a decadence that seems at first in sharp contrast to David Creedon's abandoned and dilapidated kitchen – with its peeling wallpaper, dishevelled room and broken-down hearth. One speaks of excess (wealth), the other of decay (poverty). Until we look a little more closely and see that McCarthy's still-life, a subversion of 17th-century painting, is an illusion, its surface a trick fabricated out of coloured toilet paper. The promise of a fake resonates so cleverly through McCarthy's conceit. These are the thin and unreliable surfaces of consumer society and cultural excess. In Creedon's photograph, the kitchen appears authentic – a real situation, the setting of a true story – but is this abandonment, or even eviction or is the unlive room just another deserted home, left idle while its former inhabitants upgrade? It is possible, too, that Creedon's photograph is a staged and fictional set-up where he produces such exceptional surfaces, giving a tactile, almost three dimensional quality to the photographic print.

For **Altered Images** Amanda Coogan has been given a specific task – to create a new work that draws on individual works in the exhibition in order to activate ideas that occur within, and also to provide another layer of thinking on contemporary art. This is challenging. Coogan's response is to create a structured film in seven chapters. Each chapter is of 3-4 minutes duration including an opening chapter that reflects

on contemporary art, meaning and ways of seeing. Seeing for Coogan is related to the brain, to the heart and to what you remember, it will be different for each person who will bring unique experiences and knowledge to looking at art. The thinking underpinning her approach presents a liberating frame in which to explore the exhibited works from personal, idiosyncratic perspectives that strive to get inside, to understand, to provide a particular reading, but also to transcend the work itself and create something entirely new. The resulting film, inclusive of a narrated text using sign language, is alongside a more performative intervention. It is made in consideration of a deaf audience, but it is not made for a deaf audience. Nor is it a documentary. While the film does engage with the specifics of the individual works, while it does consider how work is made, or what it is, or repositions elements such as the coloured toilet paper from McCarthy's tableaux or brings in live snails when confronting Alice Maher's **'Chronicles'**, it is not 'about' the work. These elements from different works, enter into a parallel story with its own rhythms and energies, finding new scenes and other locations. It is in this **double role** – a personal activation of contemporary art for new audiences through an exploration of the exhibited works and as a director of new film work, separate and distinct – that Coogan's film is remarkable. Art made out of art. A new film that possesses potential to shine a way into thinking about seeing, bringing what is already known and experienced to bear on what is new. It allows us to venture forth, respectful of the distance – the gaps in our knowledge

overcome, or eased by what we might already know – showing us that **‘interpreting the world [is] a means of transforming it, reconfiguring it’**, as Jacques Rancière writes in ‘The Emancipated Spectator’(XI). Coogan’s belief is in the poignancy of the image and in our abilities to look, to read, to find **things** within that might relate to **things** without.

**Altered Images** is an exhibition where curatorial concerns are set in connection with universal audiences. In doing this it presents works that allow a range of entry points for audiences to consider and which collectively raise greater questions (and mysteries) around our experiences of being in the world. The curators’ concern to enhance the viewing experiences for many different audiences shifts an emphasis away from purely optical viewing. In so doing, their experiment aligns with current ground, which is considering the very act of looking at and experiencing art. Where do answers lie – in the work itself or somewhere outside of the work – in the specific sensorium in which art will be perceived? There is, perhaps, no such thing as the purely visual, and the curatorial emphasis here allows us to think about what Merleau-Ponty writes **‘that we look out from the inside’**(XII) or as, James Elkins says **‘what sees is the mind’**(XIII). From this position a more generous space is made available and the curators and partner organisations present their exhibition as an organisation of hope, where many tiny empowerments makes for a space that belongs to everyone. The barriers dismantled through considerable effort, time,

inventiveness and attitude are like the selected artworks that play in various ways with art historical conventions to uncover or explore aspects – mysteries or anxieties – of everyday living which resonate on many levels.

Clíodhna Shaffrey

(I)

Victor Burgin, ‘Perverse Space’ in **Sexuality and Space**, ed. Beatriz Colomina, Princeton Architectural Press, New York, 1992, p.227

(II)

Gilles Deleuze, **Negotiations, 1972-1990**, trans. Martin Joughin, Columbia University Press, New York, 1995, p.52

(III)

Brian Dillon, **In the Dark Room: A Journey in Memory**, Penguin Ireland, 2005, p.6

(IV)

Walter Benjamin ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’ in **Illuminations**, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn, Fontana, London, 1973, p. 238

(V)

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, ‘Eye and Mind’ in **Continental Aesthetics**, ed. Richard Kearney and David Rasmussen, Blackwell, Oxford, 2001, p. 290

(VI)

Suzi Gablik ‘Connective Aesthetics: Art after Individualism’ in **Mapping the Terrain, New Genre Public Art**, ed. Suzanne Lacy, Bay Press, Seattle, 1995, p. 85, Gablik argues for the cultivation of empathy that can create a voice for members of groups previously excluded from the conventional art world.

(VII)

Lucy Cotter, **When we were older**, 2005. <[www.thomasbrezing.com/reviews/remembering.html](http://www.thomasbrezing.com/reviews/remembering.html)>, Accessed 20 May 2009.

(VIII)

Aidan Dunne, ‘Childsplay’ in **The Irish Times**, 2005. <[www.thomasbrezing.com/reviews/childsplay.html](http://www.thomasbrezing.com/reviews/childsplay.html)>, Accessed 20 May 2009.

(IX)

Emily Mark Fitzgerald in conversation with Alice Maher, 2007. <[www.stoneyroadpress.com/pdf/Artists\\_Essays/Maher\\_Conversation.pdf](http://www.stoneyroadpress.com/pdf/Artists_Essays/Maher_Conversation.pdf)>, Accessed 20 May 2009.

(X)

James Elkins, **The Object Stares Back**, Harcourt Brace, CA, 1996 p.49-51. Elkins writes eloquently about the presence of the object full of eyes. What sees is the mind, connected to the eye, but the eye itself is just tissue. The world is so crowded with things that see and stare and can grow terrifying, smothering claustrophobia when everything seems to be watching.

(XI)

Jacques Rancière ‘The Emancipated Spectator’, **Artforum**, March 2007. <[www.cybergrain.com/remediality/ranciere\\_spectator.pdf](http://www.cybergrain.com/remediality/ranciere_spectator.pdf)>

(XII)

Merleau-Ponty, **Eye and Mind**, p. 298

(XIII)

Elkins, **The Object Stares Back**, p.48

Artworks

Amanda Coogan

Abigail O’Brien

Caroline McCarthy

Daphne Wright

Alice Maher

Thomas Brezing

David Creedon

Amanda Coogan  
*Seven Steps*  
2009

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Film work  
Dimensions variable  
Commission, Irish Museum of Modern Art,  
South Tipperary County Council,  
Mayo County Council, 2009



The centrality of Amanda Coogan's practice is the durational live performance where her powerful live events are fundamental to her videos and photographs. Her expertise lies in her ability to condense an idea to its very essence and communicate it through her body.

Coogan's first language is Irish Sign Language (ISL). Before studying performance art with Marina Abramovic in Germany, Coogan studied painting at NCAD and consequently brings 'painterly qualities' to her performances.

In the video work **Seven Steps** Coogan introduces the audience to contemporary art via the artworks included in **Altered Images**. The video is presented in ISL with performative interventions.

Born in Ireland in 1971, Amanda Coogan lives and works in Dublin.

Abigail O'Brien  
*The Last Supper*  
1995

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Seven Cibachrome photographs, table,  
chair, embroidered tablecloth, dinner set  
Dimensions variable  
Collection Irish Museum of Modern Art  
Purchase, 1996



Domesticity, everyday ritual and rites of passage are explored in Abigail O'Brien's practice, using a variety of media including sculpture, sewing, video, sound and photography.

Abigail O'Brien's contemporary versions of the seven sacraments were inspired by traditional patriarchal interpretations ubiquitous in Catholic liturgy. The sacrament at the centre of O'Brien's **The Last Supper**, 1995, is matrimony, and in this case the protagonist depicted in the panel of seven photographs is a bride accompanied by female supporters and a baby in preparation for her wedding. A wooden table sits in front of the photographs, laid with a white tablecloth embroidered with a counting motif and a single table setting in the bride's position. The suggestion of absence and the reference to Leonardo da Vinci's 15th-century fresco indicated by the title, colours and staged characters point to an ambiguous future.

Born in Ireland in 1957, Abigail O'Brien currently lives and works in Dublin.

Caroline McCarthy  
*The Luncheon*  
2002

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Photograph of still-life made from wet toilet paper, black bin-bags, real stalks, fake flies and disposable tableware  
114 x 196 cm  
Collection Irish Museum of Modern Art  
Donated by AIB, 2002



Caroline McCarthy uses installation, video, photography and sculpture in her practice to make witty observations about the nature of consumerism and representation, while engaging with and commenting on historical and traditional notions of art and the artist. **The Luncheon** is a large scale photograph of a still-life made from wet toilet paper, resulting in a pastiche of 17th-century traditional still-life painting, replete with fruit, vegetables and vanitas-style flies.

**‘Colour has no relation to the function of toilet-paper. It’s a tasteful consideration. As the ideas of abundance, excess, desire and consumption have historically been intrinsic to still-life painting, the similar associations of today’s toilet-papers enable it, as material-of-choice, to slip naturally into the traditional still-life mould.’<sup>(1)</sup>**

Born in Ireland in 1971, Caroline McCarthy currently lives and works in London.

Caroline McCarthy was the winner of the Allied Irish Banks (AIB) Award 2001. This work was donated to the Irish Museum of Modern Art by AIB.

1. **Irish Museum of Modern Art, The Collection**, IMMA, Dublin, 2005, p.120

Daphne Wright  
*Plura*  
2008-9

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DVD

Camera – John Podpadec.

Film editing – Mino De Francesca  
and Daphne Wright.

Sound editing – Nathan Ng and Daphne Wright.

Collection South Tipperary Arts Service

Commission, 2008-2009



Daphne Wright is known for her unsettling yet poignant sculptural installations which use a variety of techniques and materials including photography, plaster, tinfoil, sound, voice and video. She has also worked on larger scale public art projects, working with artists across disciplines, architects, writers and theatre professionals to create works that are concerned with the ineffable.

In **Plura**, a film work commissioned by South Tipperary County Council, Daphne Wright uses 18th-century classical sculpture as a source of her film work. Wright presents an intricate film work in which a web of fragmented figurative forms are enveloped by the guttural sounds of male and female phonetic voices. The voices and fractured bodies submerge the spectator in a world of remembering or loss of memory recalling a struggle with language, conversation and relationships. As critical writer Laura Mansfield, writes, the artist is **‘imbuing the figures with an emotive connection and shifting classical bodies from cold stone to an intimate and human composition’**.<sup>1</sup>

Born in Ireland in 1963, Daphne Wright currently lives in England.

1. Laura Mansfield, **Plura**, 2009, See [www.alteredimages.ie](http://www.alteredimages.ie)

Alice Maher  
*Double Drawing*  
2005

34



35

Intaglio print  
53 x 49.5 cm  
Collection South Tipperary County Council  
Purchase, 2008

Alice Maher produces predominantly sculptural work, using a wide range of material from the traditions of cast bronze to the more discomforting natural materials such as briars, thorns, dead bees, lambs' tongues, human hair and snails. Maher is also equally recognised for her works on paper and canvas, using print, charcoal and acrylic.

The **Snail Chronicles** are a set of five etchings produced in 2004. After feeding live snails a diet of vegetable dyes, Maher used the drawing made by the coloured snail trails and added her own dream-like imaginings to the nebulous swirls and marks made by the snails. The prints express Maher's fascination with the minutiae and largesse of the natural world,

**'I always find that the smallest thing, a small insect, ... the kind of marks they make reflect the gigantesse of the cosmos. So that swirl looks like a star system. The smallest thing in the universe reflects the largest.'** <sup>1</sup>

Born in Ireland in 1956, Alice Maher currently works in County Mayo.

1. 'How do you know?' Alice Maher, In conversation with Emily Mark FitzGerald, 7 June 2007, Stoney Road Press

Alice Maher  
*The Snail Chronicles (fever bush)*  
2005

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37

Intaglio print  
53 x 49.5 cm  
Collection South Tipperary County Council  
Purchase, 2008



Thomas Brezing  
*Did Germany put the sun there?*  
2007

Oil on paper  
29 x 42 cm  
Collection Mayo County Council  
Purchase, 2007



German-born artist Thomas Brezing, now living in Ireland, works primarily as a painter, but has also produced installations. Brezing's themes of displacement and belonging nowhere are prevalent in his work as he confronts profound realities and in particular the history of his own country of birth. The playful and dream-like landscapes in **Did Germany put the sun there?** and **It has the untidyness of a real event** reveal, on closer scrutiny, darker and more sinister concerns. While Brezing believes that a work of art should take the responsibility of asking the 'bigger questions', even if that means going to uncomfortable places, he does not expect to provide the answers.

Born in Germany in 1969, Thomas Brezing currently lives in Ireland.

Thomas Brezing  
*It has the untidyness of a real event*  
2007

40

41

Oil on paper  
29 x 42 cm  
Collection Mayo County Council  
Purchase, 2007



David Creedon  
*Green Kitchen*  
2007

42

43

Photograph  
51 x 76 cm  
Collection Mayo County Council  
Purchase, 2007



David Creedon is a photographer whose practice developed through the use of a 1963 Linhof Technika large format camera. While he now works in digital photography, he continues to use the methodology formed through that earlier practice.

A level of theatricality in Creedon's photographs is achieved by his interest in certain lighting effects and in particular the atmospheric use of shadow and light influenced by the **film noir** genre. His approach to subject matter is one of methodical research which he records over a considerable period of time, and it is in the details, with the iconography of Catholicism for instance, that this atmospheric presence is so forcefully interpreted. **Green Kitchen** is an image from a series of works entitled **Ghosts of the Faithful Departed**, in which Creedon examines the desperate plight of Irish emigration from the early 1950s until the 1980s. Reminiscent of Dutch interior paintings, poignant expressive details in his photographs record a story within the work; here however, the darker side of life suffered through enforced emigration, abandonment, poverty and loss are seen quite clearly in the remnants of once domestic homes. The **Green Kitchen** is a photograph taken in a derelict house in West Cork which Creedon came across by accident.

David Creedon, born in Ireland in 1957, currently lives in Carrigaline, County Cork.

### Mayo County Council Arts Service

The County Arts Service was set up in 1989 and is firmly based on the principles of quality, access, inclusion and long-term value. The Service includes the following areas: information, promotion, advice, programming, planning and policy. It covers all art forms: music, visual arts, drama, dance, film, community arts, festivals and public art. The effectiveness of the service is maximised through networking and strategic partnerships, with emphasis on the integration of arts into everyday life. The Arts Service’s support of artists, arts practitioners and those involved in the arts continues to be the core of a progressive and responsive service.

### South Tipperary County Council Arts Service

The Arts Service aims to encourage the promotion of the arts and to maximize their potential both directly and as an ‘enabler’ and to ensure that the planning and policy of the arts in the county is both developmental and strategic, striving for quality, inclusion, access and sustainability. The Service aims to be as inclusive as possible to all sectors of society and to ensure a provision and promotion of local, national and international arts, across all art forms, throughout the whole of South Tipperary.

### The National Programme

The central aim of the National Programme of the Irish Museum of Modern Art is to establish the Museum’s core values of excellence, inclusiveness and accessibility to contemporary art on a national level. Focusing on the Museum’s Collection, the programme facilitates off-site projects and exhibitions in a range of venues and situations throughout Ireland. For IMMA the design and implementation of exhibitions such as **Altered Images** involves an engagement with various communities using the Museum’s Collection as the core resource to evoke a series of different responses and to foster a sense of ownership over the National Collection.

The Museum aims to act as a resource at a local level through working in partnership and relying on the knowledge and concerns of the local community. Partner organisations are wide-ranging and include a variety of venues both in traditional art and non-arts spaces, allowing for far-reaching access and interaction.



The audio descriptions for **Altered Images** are provided by Mind's Eye, a professional description service, established by Anne Hornsby in the early 1990s to provide access to the arts for blind and visually impaired people. Anne works all over the British Isles providing live and recorded audio description for theatre, film and the visual arts.

She particularly enjoyed working on this project as it involved such an exciting range of contemporary art-forms, and provided the opportunity to work with many different partners throughout Ireland, who have all shown a real commitment to access from the very beginnings of the project.

She also appreciated working with Loz Simpson of Topografik to ensure maximum accessibility for visitors. They hope that the resulting combination of the audio descriptions and tactile interpretations will enable visitors to fully realise the works in their imaginations. Anne is an accredited audio description trainer and Chair of the Audio Description Association.

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## **Topografik Access For All Interpretation**

Loz Simpson of Topografik is a sculptor and designer who specialises in tactile interpretation. Since 2001 Loz's work has been informed by a close working relationship with the RNIB in the UK and in consultation with art galleries, heritage sites, disability groups and individuals committed to access for all.

Topografik installations are available to touch at heritage sites and public galleries throughout the UK, including the Laing Gallery in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Kew Palace, the Tower of London and the Wellcome Gallery in London.

**Altered Images represents an exciting and inclusive approach to exhibiting contemporary art to a diverse range of gallery visitors in Ireland, enthusiastically bringing together artists, county councils, curators, disability professionals and interpreters from its inception. Share our enthusiasm and experience this inspiring collection of evocative art in your own way: See, Hear and Please Touch!**

Loz Simpson  
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For information about the project or exhibition programme please go to [www.alteredimages.ie](http://www.alteredimages.ie) or contact:

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