

Introduction to institutions

Rationale

Project information

Site-Specific collaboration with The Irish Museum of Modern Art

Site-Specific collaboration with The Irish Museum of Modern Art - Innovative Approaches to Curriculum delivery of a First Year Visual Arts Practice Programme

The School of Creative Arts is one of three schools located in Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art and Design. The Creative Arts programmes push the conventional discipline boundaries through creative collaboration and interaction between programmes and the professional environment.

The B.A (Hons) in Visual Arts Practice course within The School of Creative Arts in IADT, is a four year programme that is designed to provide the student with the opportunity to develop a practice which is relevant to the many opportunities which exist for artists and to understand the challenges of working in the visually and critically sophisticated landscape of contemporary art.

The student intake into the 1st year of the Visual Arts Practice [VAP] programme is approximately 50 students with an age group between 18 to 40 years.

The Irish Museum of Modern Art is the national cultural institution for the collection and presentation of modern and contemporary art in Ireland. IMMA exhibits and collects modern and contemporary art by established and emerging Irish and international artists.

IMMA is developing its potential as both **site** and **subject** for research. IMMA encourages second and third-level students and tutors to use IMMA as a site for both practical and theory-based research initiatives.

The educational backgrounds of 1st Year VAP students vary from direct school leavers, portfolio preparation courses, (PLC) Post Leaving Certificate courses, FETAC (Further Education and Training Awards Council) and HETAC (Higher Education and Training Awards Council) courses.

The level of visual skills and technical competencies of the student intake are diverse. In a response to student type and variant and as an educational goal to establish the cognitive and motivational foundation from which expertise may emerge, we have endeavoured to deliver a programme of study that cultivates strategic thinking and processing in support of research autonomy and self-directed study. Through the development of a range of specific projects, students are given an opportunity, to practice strategies, to personalise or modify strategies and to transfer strategies to other problems and contexts. Effectively students become authors of their own learning experience.

One of a number of key projects developed to cultivate strategic thinking and processing in support of research autonomy and self-directed study is the site-specific project; which uses a location (off campus) as a starting point for the investigation and creation of a multi disciplinary body of research work. Working off campus is an important departure for students in that it moves them to go beyond the familiar while placing their learning more effectively by engaging students to find ways to experience new information first hand.

Site-specific artwork has established a critical context within the international art world. It involves artwork that is created to exist in a certain place; the artist takes the location into account while planning and creating the artwork.

The Irish Museum of Modern Art, a key cultural and national resource for the visual arts, was chosen as a location for the site-specific project. The opportunity to collaborate with the



Case study

museum was invaluable to the students learning experience, allowing them direct access to a rich and varied programme of events and an opportunity to collaborate with the museums educational and artist residency programme. Equally beneficial were the provision of working studio spaces on site to process and develop research material.

This project has been running for the past two years with upwards of a hundred students. The duration of the project, which commences in December of each academic year is four weeks and consists of proximity eighty hours of direct study.

Key locations were identified within the grounds of the museum as starting points for the gathering of research material. Students were encouraged to explore and develop their research work through a diverse range of approaches and treatments [Experiential Learning] and through the manipulation of traditional and non-traditional materials such as drawing, photography, sculpture and video.

An intrinsic part of the learning students undertake in the site-specific project is working towards self-direction and self-evaluation. As with other forms of strategic behaviour, should be shown effective self direction and be provided with instruction that equips them to evaluate their thinking and learning. Web technology and to be more specific the Wiki was adopted as a tool to assist students in self-direction and self-evaluation. And as part of the project outcomes students were asked to publish online all their video, audio, photographs, drawings and site-specific research and artwork.

Design

Students were randomly divided into groups by tutors for the project allowing for a group dynamic to evolve for the development of research work. Equally there were opportunities for the individual as well as the collective experience to take place - the group discourse informing the individual learning experience.

Procedure

During our time at IMMA students were encouraged to expand their knowledge base by accessing the comprehensive range of archival material on contemporary artists and to avail of opportunities to hear presentations by key artists, writers, critics and art historians in the context of lectures, gallery-based talks or seminars.

Site-specific art works within the grounds of the museum offered students an opportunity to learn from given examples as was the case with the artist in residency process room, were current resident artists would exhibit their work in progress.

Evaluation 1

IADT Project Team

In order to assess the effectiveness of the project an evaluation was carried out by means of a questionnaire.

Student questionnaire

- 1 In your opinion what was interesting about the project?
- 2 How did the technology enable you to evaluate your work?
- 3 Has this method of learning transferred into your future work practice?
- 4 How effective did you find the technology to communicate your project to a wider audience?
- 5 What would you change about the project if anything?

Results from questionnaires

In relation to **Question 1**, 94% of students were positive regarding working off campus and in particular the collaboration with Irish Museum of Modern Art.
'Being able to work in IMMA for an entire month, being given studio



space, experimenting with different methods in a site specific place, using the website the showcase our work.' from Student 32 (F)

'Getting out of the studio, working outside and responding to the particular space I was in. It was a very direct and authentic way of researching' from Student 4 (M)

In response to **Question 2**, students found the implementation of the wiki site beneficial in regards to self-direction, and self-evaluation.

'It helped me learn a method of organising my work, I have used the same method of breaking down my work into divisions and sub-divisions since the project' from Student 46 (F)

'The wiki site helped me put together my work in a way I could clearly look over my progress' from Student 27 (M)

Although we had anticipated that **Question 3** would cover visual research methods the majority of the feedback was primarily concerned with the implementation of the wiki.

'It has, during the project I set up my own website of a similar model for my work (personal and educational) and have been using it for a while. Its something that would be extremely useful in all projects as a motivator' from student 31 (M)

'Yes. The research methods I learned in the IMMA project I have hopefully carried over into my 2nd term project. It helped set up a solid foundation on which to experiment and eliminate or keep work.' From student 20 (F)

In reply to **Question 4** the technology has given students an awareness of the audience and an opportunity to transfer and share their knowledge and research with that audience.

'The web page created a great way to get communicate our work to a wider audience' from student 19 (F)

In reply to **Question 5** the main points emerging from the students included the following:

(1) unfavourable weather conditions 21%; (2) the need for more time on location 21%; (3) more training for web/wiki 12%; (4) access to materials and equipment 10%; (5) would not change anything 29%.

Evaluation 2

Lisa Moran - Irish Museum of Modern Art

Groups of third-level students, and the IADT student group in particular, tend to be self-directed and facilitated, subject to the competency and experience of the facilitating tutors. The IADT student group represents a model of practice for how groups can independently engage with IMMA and its programmes and resources. While this is a high-functioning, self-facilitating, modular group, there are aspects of this model that can be adapted to inform how IMMA works with a wider sector of groups, which would result in an increased and more efficient use of its premises and resources. For example by encouraging and supporting facilitators and group leaders to utilise the workshop studio as a base for exploration by the group.

In the initial stages of the project there was flexibility to test ideas and to experiment, this allowed the project to adopt a blue-sky approach to research which is in keeping with the ethos of student learning and the research project in particular. This phase is important in establishing a model that can be applied and adapted to meet the needs of other student groups and a





broader sector of visitors. Therefore it is important to support the experimental nature of this initiative that allows for the boundaries of such projects to be tested.

As the project evolves and becomes a regular event, it becomes necessary to import the learning from this initial phase and implement guidelines and inevitably impose some limitations, mainly with regard to health and safety, security and conservation. These limitations relate to the way in which the group engages with IMMA, with the staff, programmes, grounds, facilities, etc.

For example;

- 1 the project places an emphasis on using the site of IMMA as a source for research and this includes the physical premises and grounds and also the artworks sited in the grounds. Through experimentation in devising a range of innovative, temporary artworks in response to IMMA's permanent artworks, a set of guidelines will now be negotiated about how these interactions can take place which take account of health and safety, security and conservation concerns while supporting the experimental nature of the initiative.
- 2 all interventions will need to be temporary not left unattended, and negotiated with key IMMA staff from the Education and Collection Departments. The emphasis on developing good documentation skills and use of fora such as the Internet to document and showcase artwork counteracts the limitations of creating temporary work.
 - guidelines will be drawn up and agreed between IMMA education curator and IADT tutors with regard to how the students engage with IMMA and its premises.
 - students will be provided with guidelines in advance of the research project.
 - these guidelines will be presented in the form of an introductory talk to the students about IMMA and its programmes and resources

Observation

Comparing the IMMA project with previous site-specific projects, we found a marked improvement in the student's ability to present clearly and informatively their research material. The use of the Wiki as a tool for self-direction and evaluation clearly motivated students to rehearse and reflect on the approaches taken in the development of their research and in doing so better equip them to critically evaluate the outcomes of their work.

Problems encountered

- 1 *Workshop facilities*
The availability of proper workshop facilities, technical support and access to materials and equipment.
In order to address this problem for future collaborations we are currently in negotiation with the museum to explore the possibility of setting up temporary workshop facilities and technical support (to be supplied by the IADT as and when required).
- 2 *Unfavourable weather conditions*
The calendar positioning of the project regarding the weather especially this year, will be given due consideration in the planning and scheduling of the project in the future.
- 3 *Health and Safety*
The Health and Safety issues of the students working on site at the museum will be addressed through a series of talks and implementation of guidelines for next year.



The relationship going forward



4 *Managing the Wiki*

Administrating of information and images posted on the wiki took up a considerable amount of time. We need to look at how we manage this going forward as an output it represents an important archive of the project.

- 1 As mentioned IMMA is encouraging a more dynamic engagement with it's programmes by developing its potential as both site and subject for research. We foresee our current collaboration evolving and formalising into a more integrated relationship in the future.
- 2 The Artists in residence programme provides opportunities for artists (local and international) to research and develop their work practice with emphasises on working process rather than the finished product; enabling them to explore new ideas and ways of working. This 'emphasis' in approach parallels with the approach taken by the IADT team. This would provide an opportunity for interesting interconnection between programmes.
- 3 As part of the exchange between the Institutions the Museum will provide expertise and access to the lecture series organised by IMMA, on relevant topics such as Public Art, Art and Audience and Research Initiatives.
- 4 Peer learning: A unique outcome of this collaboration will be to develop opportunities for second level students to visit IADT students during the onsite project so that second level students can observe onsite learning on a peer basis. This will be an informal encounter where IADT students will present their research in the studio spaces and engage in discussion about their projects with visiting second level students.
The IADT team will also present a public talk in IMMA for second level students and prospective art students on the development of 'the notebook' - an essential tool and methodology in the development of arts-based research skills.
- 5 From a pedagogical perspective the IADT team plans to refine and formalise the process of learning and teaching research. To provide opportunity for comparative analysis we will introduce a Likert scale into the questionnaire to facilitate quantitative feedback from the students.
- 6 We intend to build the presence of cloud computing (Wiki etc.) within the project. This serves three purposes; first, as a learning and teaching tool that supports critical engagement, reflection and evaluation. Second, it gives the students an opportunity (within the context of the first year programme of study) to present their work to, and interact with a global audience. Finally, it provides a permanent record of the project, a document that builds from one year to the next as the relationship between the two Institutions evolves.

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