



Iconic Citizens

Report on the Bealtaine Festival 2016

Introduction

Age & Opportunity promotes and celebrates the participation of older people in the arts through Bealtaine - the annual month-long national festival that takes place every May. The festival is Ireland's largest co-operative arts festival, and is one of the oldest festivals of its kind. It provides a showcase for celebrating the arts and creativity throughout our lives and into older age.

In addition to nurturing and supporting older and intergenerational audiences, the festival showcases the talents and skills of both established and first-time older artists and performers, promoting access to areas such as theatre, film, music, dance, the visual arts and storytelling.

Age & Opportunity is the national organisation whose mission is to inspire and empower older people to live healthy and fulfilling lives in ways that benefit our communities and wider society. It promotes the skills, experiences and exposure that can lead to a rich creative life for all older people. It also supports the arts community to continue to work and to engage artists across the generations to engage in creative ageing.

As a result of Age & Opportunity's work, Bealtaine has been recognised as a major innovator in the area of the arts, creativity and older people globally. As testament to this influence, Bealtaine has been responsible for the generation of 'sister' festivals around the world, most notably Luminare in Scotland (www.luminareScotland.org), Gwanwyn in Wales (gwanwyn.org.uk) and Long Live Art in the Netherlands (www.langlevkunst.nl/).



Brian Bourke at work in the Cow House Studios (photo: Jay Murphy)

In 2016, Bealtaine outlined five specific aims:

1. to provide critical opportunities for the greater participation and representation of older people in the arts;
2. to develop arts programmes for disadvantaged older people;
3. to provide opportunities and peer-to-peer supports for older professional artists;
4. to provide opportunities for intergenerational exchange;
5. to generate debate and discourse around key cultural issues impacting on older people and to create other opportunities to influence national and international policy.

As a co-operative festival, Bealtaine works on two parallel and interdependent strands: the national festival that is organised, curated and run locally; and the strategic initiatives that are centrally organised and curated through Age & Opportunity. The strategic initiatives specifically aim to address and target particular policy issues such as those outlined above and to develop events and activities that may not otherwise happen.

There are two key dimensions to the Bealtaine programme: firstly, Bealtaine brings arts programmes to and by older people in Ireland, thereby providing opportunities for creativity that participants might not otherwise experience; secondly, Bealtaine has the potential to make a significant contribution to the health and wellbeing of older people participating in the various activities associated with the programme.



Detail from Rhona Byrne's installation at THIS IS NOT MY BEAUTIFUL HOUSE seminar (photo courtesy of the artist)

Creativity is a key factor in adaptation to ageing and a number of studies have also shown benefits for health and social outcomes in older people. The evidence from the limited number of international studies that have been carried out suggests that creativity strengthens self-confidence and morale in later life, contributes to physical and cognitive health and enriches relationships through greater social connectivity.

This report gives an overview of the 21st year of Bealtaine. This year, 12 projects and 29 strategic events took place in: Clare, Dublin, Cork, Galway, Leitrim, Sligo, Meath, Kilkenny, Carlow, Laois, Wexford and Tipperary, in partnership with 21 organisations around the country.

The wider Bealtaine national festival involved 447 organising partners across the country, with an estimated 3,127 events with 79,197 participants.

Bealtaine 2016 generated a number of media opportunities, generating an estimated €77,820 worth of print coverage. Opportunities included: a full programme from RTÉ One Television's Nationwide covering different aspects of the Bealtaine festival, three Irish Times articles, one full-page report with journalist Sarah Keating interviewing the older theatre practitioners participating in the PRIME theatre workshops, one with journalist Sylvia Thompson meeting the Blow the Dust Off Your Trumpet orchestra in the National Concert Hall and a Diary page with national writer-in-residence Brian Leyden.



Blow the Dust Off
Your Trumpet in the
National Concert Hall
(photo: Tony Kinlan)

The following broadcasts were also made:

- 1st May RTE Radio One, Brian Leyden reading on Sunday Miscellany
- 4th May Kildare FM, Bealtaine interview
- 4th May 93.1 LifeFM Cork, Bealtaine interview
- 9th May RTE Radio One, Arena with Sean Rocks interviewing Deirdre O'Mahony about the exhibition First Citizens Speak!
- 11th May Midlands 103 Radio, Brian Leyden interview
- 12th May Connemara Radio, Bealtaine interview
- 13th May RTE One Television, Nationwide on the life of Bealtaine Ambassador Veronica Dunne and visiting a community centre in Tallaght running a number of arts events for Bealtaine 2016
- 14th May Shannonside, Brian Leyden interview
- 18th May LMFM, Brian Leyden interview
- 24th May RTE One Radio, Marie Louise O'Donnell discussing her time with The Blow the Dust Off Your Trumpet Orchestra on Today with Sean O'Rourke
- Bealtaine was also featured in advance of the festival of City FM, Near FM and Phoenix FM.



Marita Conlon-McKenna
in conversation at The
Ark (photo: Tony Kinlan)

Bealtaine Strategic Initiatives

For the last two years, Bealtaine has taken nationhood and citizenship as its core theme. Given the special year of remembrance in Ireland in 2016 and the fact that this year marks Bealtaine's 21st birthday (signalling a coming of age), the festival in 2016 took the theme of citizens and citizenship, and in particular celebrated Ireland's Iconic Citizens.

This theme was specifically addressed by Deirdre O'Mahony's exhibition 'First Citizens Speak'. Also celebrating the theme, and a key focus of the festival this year, was VOLTage – a special three-day event in Clare organised in association with Clare County of Culture and glór (via Clare County Council). VOLTage comprised eight distinct events.

As above, in 2016, the strategic initiatives comprised a mixture of residencies, commissions, professional training initiatives, strategic projects, touring, performances, workshops, readings and screenings across the visual arts, literature, music, theatre and film. Specifically, the festival comprised a visual arts residency which involved three generations of visual artists (artist Sarah Tynan, sculptor Tina O'Connell and painter Brian Bourke) and a public discussion at its conclusion chaired by Mary Ruth Walsh. There was also a literature residency which featured writer Brian Leyden who conducted a national tour giving workshops, performances (with musician Seamie O'Dowd) and mentoring.

Through VOLTage, the Care seminar considered the arts in the context of health, care and wellbeing, and created a further context for theatre company Willfredd's production of CARE. VOLTage also platformed talks by curator Catherine Marshall and artists Anna Furse, Maria Kerin and Deirdre O'Mahony, which considered the contributions made by experienced artists - as well as the issues they face (Working Lives). This discussion also showcased the specially commissioned exhibition First Citizens Speak! By Deirdre O'Mahony.



Deirdre O'Mahony discusses First Citizens Speak with some of the participants
(photo: Eamon Ward)

First Citizens Speak! comprised a short film and series of photographs responding to Bealtaine's citizenship theme for 2016, which was about the 'first citizens of Ireland'. The project explored the memories and thoughts of older members of a community in North Clare – aiming to investigate the values and behaviours they hold dear and that are, and were, particularly important in allowing them to attain a notable level of contentedness and connectedness. The project involved the artist working with GP Dr Fergus Glynn (whose catchment area is in North Clare) as interlocutor, anthropologist Anne Byrne and local members of the North Clare communities as interviewers and mediators.

Bealtaine also worked with the open-access lifelong learning initiative KCAT (Kilkenny Collective for Arts Talent), thorough a two-week residency with visual artist Anna Spearman and an exhibition by painter Andrew Pike. There were two professional development initiatives directing peer-to-peer supports for older professional artists in both the visual arts (with artist Robert Ballagh) and Theatre (through PRIME: Continuing Professional Development (CPD) For Mature Actors).

Discussion and debate was generated through the seminar 'This Is Not My Beautiful House' which aimed to address the need to radically rethink traditional notions of 'community' and agency in shaping residential and community design that enhances human dignity and growth. The seminar was chaired by writer and psychoanalytic practitioner Dr Medb Ruane, with a keynote address by writer and researcher François Matarasso. In addition to this, there were presentations and workshops from Rodd Bond from the Netwell centre who presented on the Great Northern Haven in Dundalk, UK based consultants Susan Jones and Esther Salamon on independent creative living, representatives from the Nimble Spaces architecture/art project on their work, researcher and writer Ann Leahy, artists Marie Brett, Ríonach Ní Néill and Tom Meskell (on their work), artist and architect Blaithin Quinn, arts facilitator and MacAuley Place board member Carolann Courtney, and Coordinator of the Active Age Partnership, Maurice O'Connell.



Robert Ballagh presents at 'Sustaining Your Practice' in partnership with VAI (photo: Tony Kinlan)

As part of the seminar, Bealtaine also commissioned an intervention by artist Rhona Byrne responding to the seminar themes. The resulting work dealt with issues of transition, discomfort and disorientation in an oblique reference to the move many of us make in later life to care home settings. Using household carpeting around the entrance to The Lab Studio, Byrne wished to evoke a threshold state that signals the changes of behaviour that can be necessitated by moving out of the familiar world of one's own home and, though using discarded clothes, moving into the unknown and new community suddenly joined.

The IFI and access>CINEMA programmed the annual film tour to coincide with the festival and, building on this relationship, Age & Opportunity began a pilot film project which introduced film curation sessions for activities organisers who participate in Age & Opportunity's Creative Exchanges QQI Level 6 course. This work is leading to a 'Summer Film Festival' in seven care settings.

The world of children's literature and the role of mentoring was also foregrounded in a public conversation and reading event with Marita Conlon-McKenna and children's writer Sarah Webb at the Ark ('2 generations – 2 writers'). Dublin's Books Upstairs hosted the Poetry Ireland Bealtaine poetry event with poets Ciarán O'Rourke and Julie Morrissy, novelist Mary Morrissy (Julie's aunt) and poet Enda Wyley (aunt of Ciarán) reading and discussing their work.

Wexford Arts Centre showcased music and readings with singer-songwriter Paul Creane (leader of the Changing Band, and star of Paul O'Brien's new film 'Staid'), writer Peter Murphy, (author of 'John the Revelator' and 'Shall We Gather at the River', and a member of the Revelator Orchestra), and solo artist Paula Cox (formerly singer with The Bush, the Tree and Me, and guest collaborator with Colm Mac Con Iomaire and the Frames).



Artist Sinead Dineen speaks at the 'Care' seminar as part of VoltAGE (photo: Eamon Ward)

National Programme Research

Methodology

This evaluation research is chiefly concerned with the national programme. The principal data collection approach, which is consistent with Age & Opportunity's approach over the past number of years, has been to survey event organisers post-festival, gathering figures on how many events were organised, how many people attended, etc. The aim is to survey at least one-third of organisers each year, providing the survey with a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of just under 7. From this data, figures for the overall festival are then extrapolated.

The survey provides quantities on events, attendees, cash invested, in-kind investment, along with information on the inter-organisation co-operation, along with unstructured data about why organisers participated in the festival, what obstacles were faced and how they would like to be supported into the future.

Research innovation for 2016

The main research innovation for 2016 in terms of getting feedback on the festival is the introduction of the 'Bealtaine Detectives' as a pilot during the festival. In order to get first-hand feedback on the Bealtaine strategic initiatives, we invited a small number of members of our Cultural Companions group to offer a response to as many events as they could attend during the festival. In return for their feedback, we gave these 'detectives' an honorarium. These results of this initiative will be documented through a special meeting in the autumn.



Artist Andrew Pike exhibition opening at Damer House with curator Catherine Marshall and artist Patricia Hurl, Therry Rudin (Image courtesy of KCAT)

Cultural Companions is a peer-led network of older people who, with support from Age & Opportunity, curate and attend a monthly programme of events. While there are over 100 people in the network, we asked a small number of established members to take part in order to test the concept. From that, only a small number were in a position to attend but enough to provide initial proof of concept.

Also during 2016, we added new questions to the survey to get estimates from organisers of the age range of participants, the age range of participating professional artists and the nature of the events organised.



Cormac Kinsella introduces Brian Leyden in the Workmen's Club, Dublin (photo: Joyce Dunne)

Facts & Figures

Table 1: Participating organisations by type & location
(Numbers from the Bealtaine website and brochures received from participating organisers)

Type of Organisation	Carlow	Cavan	Clare	Cork	Donegal	Dublin	Galway	Kerry	Kildare	Kilkenny	Laois	Leitrim	Limerick	Longford	Louth	Mayo	Meath	Monaghan	Offaly	Roscommon	Sligo	Tipperary	Waterford	Westmeath	Wexford	Wicklow	NI/International	Total
National Arts & Cultural Institution	0	0	0	2	0	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8
Local Authority (Arts Office or other Dept)	1	1	1	1	2	4	3	1	1	0	2	2	1	3	2	1	1	1	0	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	38
Regional Arts Centre & Arts Organisations	2	0	3	11	13	32	16	1	2	2	1	2	4	1	3	7	1	0	2	0	3	10	5	1	5	1	1	129
Public Library Branch	4	2	8	8	10	14	6	4	1	10	0	0	0	1	4	0	0	0	0	1	3	4	1	2	2	1	0	86
Retired/Older People's Community Group	0	1	2	8	5	8	18	3	1	1	2	3	4	0	2	6	1	0	3	2	5	5	1	2	1	3	0	87
Care Centre and Supported Living	4	0	1	4	11	7	17	3	1	0	0	2	0	1	4	2	1	0	0	1	6	12	1	0	0	2	1	81
Other	4	0	0	2	0	2	8	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	18
TOTAL	15	4	15	36	41	73	68	12	6	14	5	9	10	4	16	17	4	1	6	4	18	32	10	6	9	8	4	447

Table 2: Bealtaine organisers: Comparative figures

Organisers	2014	2015	2016
National Cultural Institutions & Arts Organisations	15	17	8
Local Authority Arts Offices or Other	31	18	38
Regional Arts Centres and Culture/Heritage Organisations	100	156	129
Public Library Branches	172	157	86
Retired/Older People's/Community Groups	128	97	87
Care Centres/HSE	101	138	81
Other	93	78	18
TOTAL	640	661	447

Table 3: Bealtaine events & participants: Comparative figures*

	2014	2015	2016
Estimated number of events	3217	3777	3127
Estimated number of participants	119426	125889	79197

*These estimates extrapolate from the evaluation forms returned. Adjustments are made to Library and Local Authority figures to avoid the double-counting of events. This may lead to underestimations.

Table 4: Breakdown of Age of Participants in Bealtaine

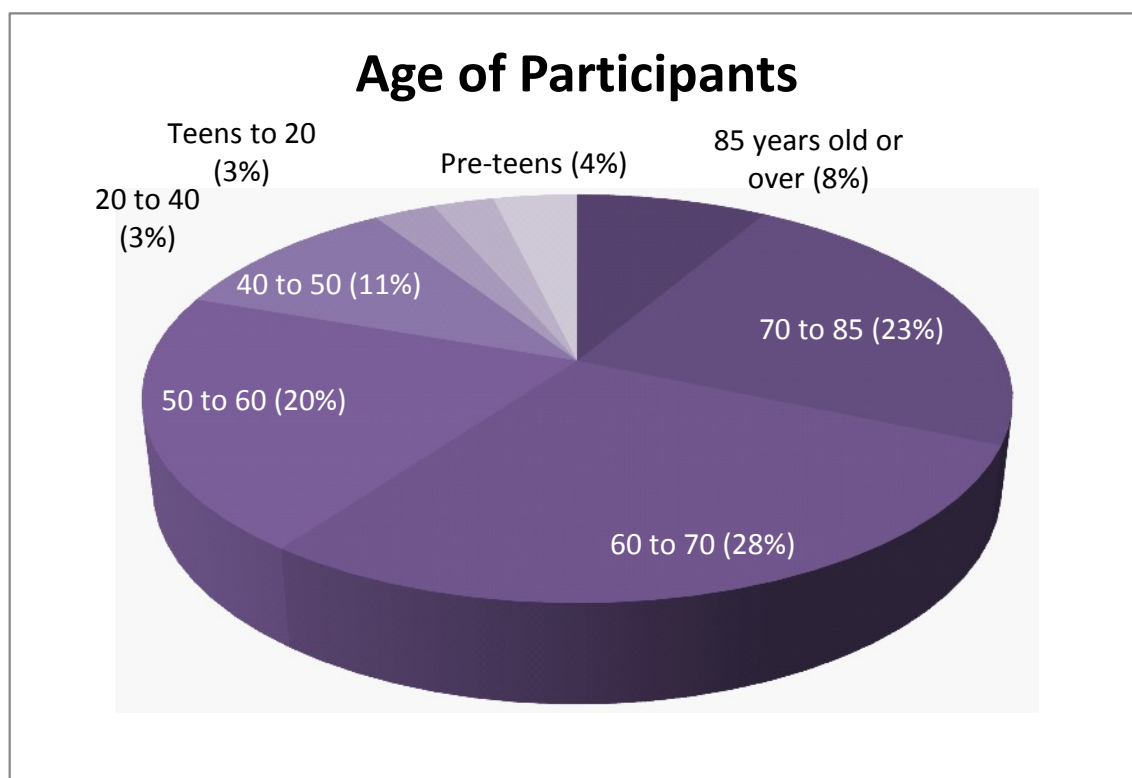


Table 7: Financial contribution by organisers

Organisers	Estimated Financial Contribution	Estimated In-Kind Contribution
National Arts / Cultural Institutions	6661	1566
Local Authority Arts Offices	42900	8055
Regional Arts Centres & Cultural Orgs	26850	12329
Public Library Branches	12155	4722
Retired/Older People's/Community Groups	4640	1963
Care Centres/HSE	5870	6160
Other	250	600
Total estimated in evaluation forms	99326	35395
Estimated total financial contribution by all organisers to Bealtaine 2016	474282	201804
Estimated total hours contribution by volunteers to Bealtaine 2016	201804	

Table 8: Media coverage for Bealtaine

	2015	2016
National newspaper coverage	623 column cms	122 column cms
Local/regional newspaper coverage	6,748 column cms	3,865 column cms
Estimated value of print coverage	138082	77890
Television coverage	3 times - 3 channels	1 time - 1 channel
Radio coverage	18 times - 13 stations	12 times - 10 stations
Web coverage	194 mentions - 95 sites	52 mentions - 32 sites

Table 9: Who did organisers contact when organising their events?

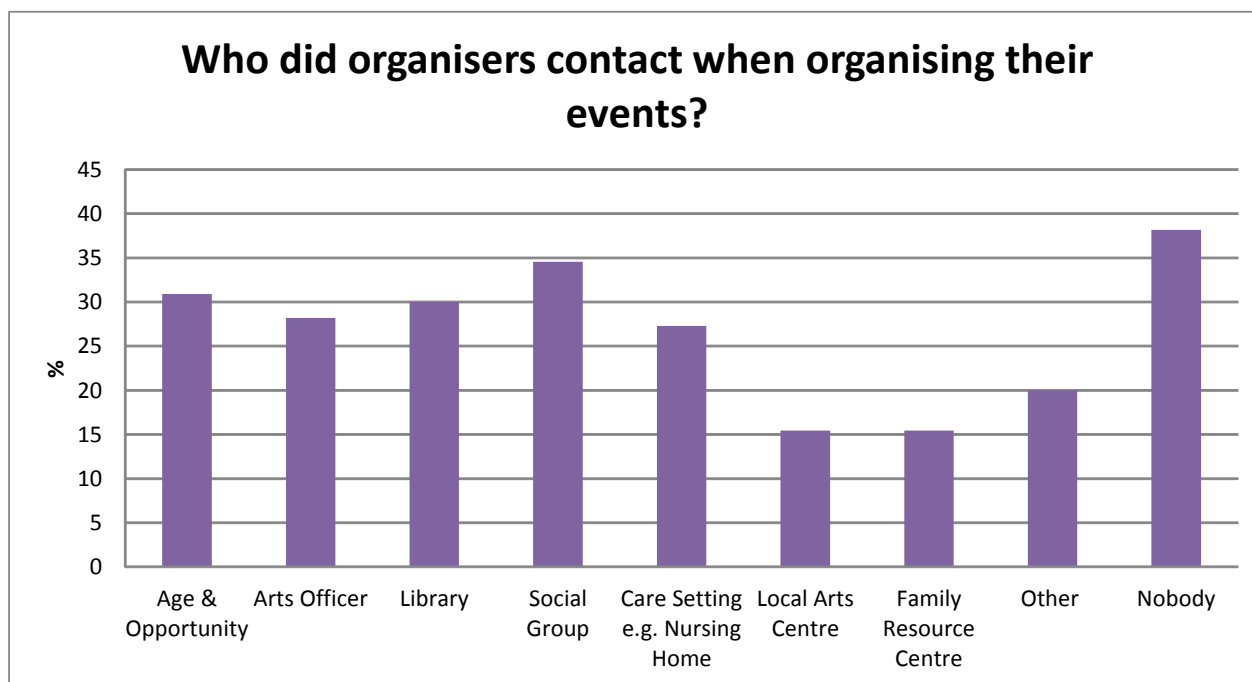
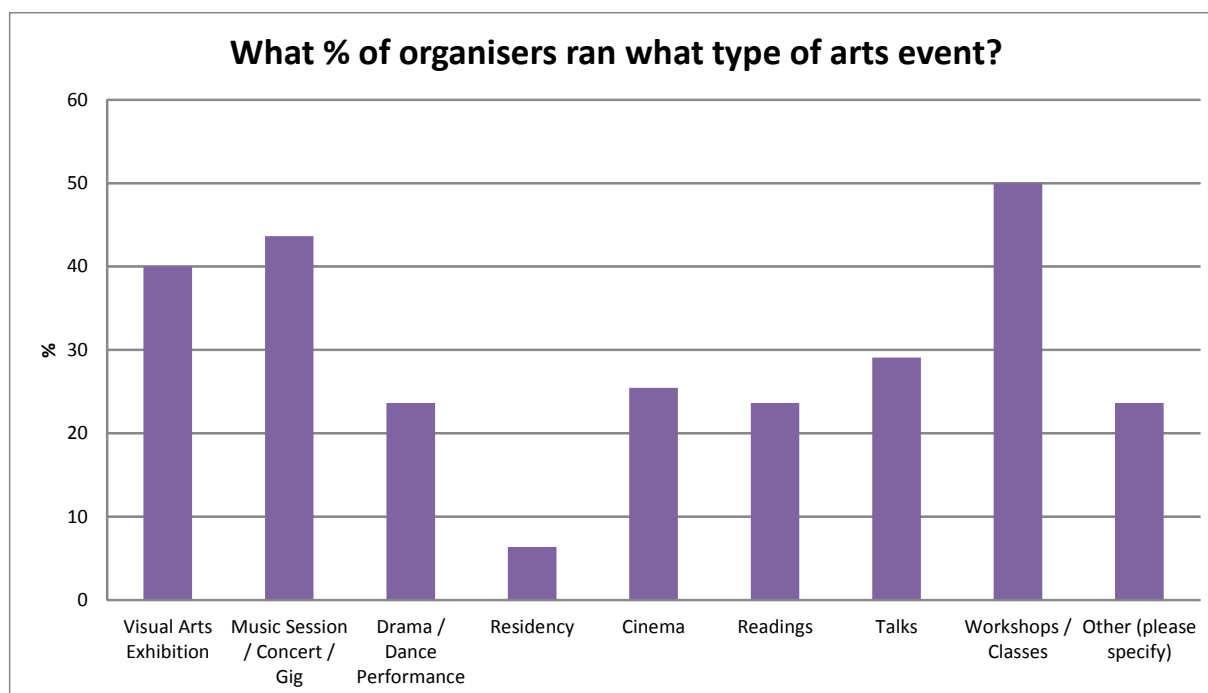


Table 10: What types of events were run for Bealtaine?



Full list of Bealtaine events:

- Cow House Studios residency with visual artists Tina O'Connell, Briain Bourke and Sarah Tynan in association with Wexford Arts Centre (Wexford): Monday 2nd – Saturday 14th May
Public Talk with Cow House Residency artists at Wexford Arts Centre, Friday 13th May.
- Bealtaine national writer-in-residence with Brian Leyden
Workshops and readings:
Sligo County Library – Thursday, 12th May,
Longford County Library – Saturday, 14th May,
Dublin Pearse St Library – Friday 20th May
Portlaoise County Library – Tuesday, 24th May
Navan County Library – Wednesday, 25th May
- Tour of Old Flames with Seamie O Dowd (Clare, Dublin, and Leitrim): 6th May Glor, Ennis Co. Clare, Saturday 21st May, Dublin International Writer's Festival, 27th May, the Dock, Carrick On Shannon.
- Anna Spearman in residence with KCAT, Callan, Co. Kilkenny
- Exhibition: Andrew Pike at Damer House Gallery, Roscrea, Tipperary: Saturday 14th May – Saturday 4th June
- PRIME- Theatre Professional Development with the Irish Theatre Institute (Dublin): Monday 23rd – Weds 25th May
- Artists' Professional Development Workshops with Visual Artists Ireland (Dublin): Thursday 26th May, the Lab Studio, Dublin
- Seminar: THIS IS NOT MY BEAUTIFUL HOUSE: Friday 20th May
- Film: Wild Strawberries Screenings in association with access>CINEMA
- Reading and performance: Writer Peter Murphy with musicians Paul Creane and Paula Cox at Wexford Arts Centre: Thursday 12th May
- Readings from novelist and short story writer Mary Morrissy, and poets Julie Morrissy, Ciarán O'Rourke and Enda Wyley, Books Upstairs, Dublin, Tuesday 17th May
- Readings with Marita Conlon McKenna and Sarah Webb at the Ark Cultural Centre
- Bealtaine film curation workshops with the Irish Film Institute (supported by the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland)

VOLTage! at glór

(An Age & Opportunity event in association with Clare County of Culture and glór) 5th May – 7th May

- Thursday 5th May: The Care Seminar
- Thursday 5th May: Exhibition: First Citizens Speak by Deirdre O'Mahony 5th- 28th May
- Thursday: 5th May: WillFredd Theatre presents CARE
- Friday 6th May: Catherine Marshall Talk: Rural Art Projects; The tail that wags the dog
- Friday 6th May: Discussion: Work, In Progress
- Friday 6th May: Old Flames Brian Leyden with Seamie O' Dowd
- Saturday 7th May: Saturday Session with Eoin O'Neill and Friends
- Saturday 7th May: Film screening as part of access>CINEMA's May Film Tour happening during the Bealtaine Festival A Walk in the Woods
- Saturday 7th May: Vladimir Jablokov in concert: One Night In Vienna



Cover: Tina O'Connell at the Cow House Studios
Above: Brian Bourke at the Cow House Studios (photos: Frank Abruzzese)