



Forgotten Song

Mullaghfad church, built in 1831 and without electricity, nestles in the heart of the forest on Sliabh Beagh. On the night of 1st July it provided the perfect setting for *Sliabh Beagh Arts* to create an immersive arts space which would showcase the array of projects they had created over the last year.





There was an exhibition of sculpture, puppets, photography & film, and live music performances from *Sonic Lotus*, *Tully*, and *Cup o'Joe* in addition to emerging young musicians Louie Bannon and Casper McCabe. The church was lit by candles and fairy lights. Outside in the warm evening straw bales and Swedish lanterns transformed the space and provided the perfect backdrop for an evening of storytelling through song and quality community arts.

Sliabh Beagh Arts is made up of 13 community groups who reside within or near the mountain which straddles the border between the counties of Fermanagh, Tyrone and Monaghan, an area that has been disadvantaged due to isolation, social deprivation, and poor community relations.

Since 2001 they have played an active role in strengthening the arts infrastructure within the area, building partnerships and aiding regeneration through quality rural Arts provision. Through their annual programme they have animated, fostered and promoted contacts and collaboration across the community and across the border, using Visual Arts, Music, Sculpture, Environmental Arts, Photography, Literature, Digital Media, Ceramics, Performance and Exhibition to facilitate the growth of creativity within the area.

This year, the *Growth & Decay* programme is focused on a number of innovative rural initiatives including Gate Weaving, Graffiti Bales, Barn Murals and Limerick Lanes – all of which use familiar features such as dirty barn walls, six-bar metal field gates, concrete lanes and silage bales to add quality art to the local landscape and the everyday lives of farming communities, encouraging not only local participation but also enquiries from passers-by.

All of the work produced relies heavily on the local artists who facilitate the projects: Lisa McCabe, Sinead Connolly, Annie-June Callaghan, Charlie Clifford, Max Carnson, Olivia Johnson Murphy, Patrick McCabe, Elaine Agnew and Kevin McHugh.

They work closely with local schools, bringing programmes of animation, puppetry, storytelling and song to the area. They are all highly talented

individuals who are dedicated and passionate about making the arts accessible and available within a rural context, and about passing their skills and experience on to the participants.

The support received from local community groups and volunteers allows the organization to develop projects which have relevance and meaning to the communities involved. Welcomed by teachers, parents and pupils the workshops add creativity and enjoyment to the school curriculum in addition to introducing new skills and inspiration to the youth of the area.

Slieve Beagh Arts are supported by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland and are recognised as a leading contributor to the quality and richness of rural arts within Northern Ireland. Now in their 13th year, they are continuously evolving. With a new Digital Media and Ceramics studio opened in Corranny last year, they are building solid foundations for future developments and sustainability.

Donna Bannon is coordinator of *Slieve Beagh Arts*