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The Bogside Artists Newsletter Issue 1.

By The Bogside Artists

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THE BOGSIDE ARTISTS NEWSLETTER – Issue 1

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Hi,

No. We are not going to tell you how to make a million by farming bagpipes in Donegal. Nor do we wish to add to the deluge of unwanted horseshit already in your email box. Instead, we will amuse, inform, edify and even hang around later for your questions. If you got something that is useful, true or funny, drop us a line.

Mailto: bogsideartists@bogsideartists.com

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1. DERRY

Derry or "Londonderry", to give it its formal title, boasts some of the most beautiful women to be found anywhere on the planet, with Belfast running a close second. That probably explains why Derry men are crazier than most and Belfast men crazier than anybody. Derry however, has a colorful history every bit as interesting as its indigenous beauties. Each issue of our Newsletter will offer a little snippet or two of information on the

subject (history, that is) about which, especially since the onset of the "troubles", numerous learned tomes have been written.

_ Derry gets its name from the ancient Irish word "daire" meaning an oak grove. The oak tree was venerated by the Celts and is likely that Druids used the grove for their rituals. The "daire" was situated on a crannog or small island in the river Foyle. As the waters receded, the surrounding area turned into bogland, whence derives the name Bogside. The hill itself once boasted a fortress not unlike that overlooking Lough Swilly called the Grianan of Aileach.

In the sixth century Saint Colmcille (Columba 521–597) established a monastery on the hill. There is no proof of this, but it is more than likely, as founding monasteries was what Columba liked to do best. This, of course, attracted people to live nearby and so the settlement grew.

The monastery indeed was intact well into the 17th century when the colonists arrived from Scotland and England. Derrys boomtime however, was in the 12th and 13th centuries when the MacLochlainn dynasty moved in. They used their wealth to build the settlement up and when they died out, Derry fell into decline. It was not until the arrival of the De Burgos that relative prosperity returned to the growing town. The skeleton on Derry's coat of arms derives from the De Burgos.

2. EDITORIAL.

The Bogside Artists are a mysterious trio to many. Ergo, let me introduce us. As this will take up more space than I feel entitled to use, I'll be brief. In our NEXT Newsletter, you will find a fuller and more comprehensive edition at our website. We will even have our own photos! Consider this a mere introduction.

KEVIN

Kevin Hasson's formal education began with The Christian Brothers school in the Brandywell area of the city. It later moved to the Creggan and renamed itself St. Peters. That was in the early '70's. "Art even then, was the thing I was most interested in", he says. "My dad was a very talented man who used his skills and imagination to

entertain us. Creativity therefore, as a bulwark against poverty, constituted the environment I grew up in."

For his first ever trip abroad Kevin found himself on a relief mission to the starving of Calcutta. It was an experience that transformed him. In Frankfurt, he met his American wife to be. Once married, he settled down in America. Finally, he returned home with his family.

He wasn't home a fortnight when he linked up once more with Tom, whom he had first met at St. Peters. Art was the thing they had most in common. Kevin and Tom both play guitar. Kevin likes old movies.

TOM

Apart from several brief stays in England, Tom Kelly has spent all of his life in the Bogside, where he still lives. He is, in fact, leader of a small non-denominational Christian church called "Wellspring" in the heart of The Bogside. Part of Wellspring's agenda is to explore all aspects of Irish culture, particularly where it addresses the pure Christian message. Wellspring is self-sufficient and uses The Bogside Artists' studio for its meetings.

Prior to joining forces with his brother William, and his pal Kevin, Tom worked for ten years in cross-community art projects in the city as a means for getting the two communities to understand one another. He was a pioneer in the field. Tom says: "Our society has done incalculable

harm to our natural pride and sense of self-worth. Christianity addresses this." Tom has completed many murals in the city that depicted life, as it existed a long time ago. He called these 'heritage murals'. They were made for schools, hospitals and community centers.

Tom is a fine singer and musician and has produced Wellspring's one and only CD, a compilation of well-known Irish gigs and a few original numbers from Wellspring's composers.

WILLIAM

Tom's older brother William Kelly also worked in England. First he went to Queens University after a formal education at St.Columbs College. St.Columbs incidentally boasts no less than TWO Nobel Prize winners – Seamus Heaney and John Hume. Renowned playwright Brian Friel was also educated there.

William decided to leave uni and went to Carlisle,

England, to work as a Post Office counter clerk, which lasted a year. His intention was to 'grow up'. "Happily, I failed," he says.

Teaming up with his brother Tom and Kevin to form The Bogside Artists was a natural progression. William likes to read and paint and has little time left for anything else. He is married and spends his time between Australia and Ireland.

3. ON THE GRAPEVINE

Sad days for some in Derry. The old stalwarts who were in regular receipt of funding from the Derry City council have been axed this year. The purse strings are tightening. We, of course, have never received a penny and it seems that this time around, our "chances are very slim" according to one official. We are shocked, of course.

4. OUR DIARY

Recently we have organized our group along more professional lines with a management committee and everything. That means, when we apply for funding, we might conceivably be taken seriously. In the meantime, we concern ourselves with our next murals. The first of these will begin at the end of May. There will be three more in toto, and you can follow our progress with all three. You can be sure that this section of our newsletter will gradually take pre-eminence over all others.

So now you know all about us! Our intention is to complete the remaining three murals for the Bogside. It will be an open-air gallery, unique of its kind. Our Newsletters, of which this is the first, will keep you informed of our progress; and in the "Diary" section especially, you will read about the bizarre and wonderful events that unfold, as we go about making our murals.....because what actually happens to The Bogside Artists, on a day to day basis, is a helluva lot funnier than anything we could make up. Also, we will be able to post photos taken in situ on our Newsletter so that you can get a real intimation of what it is like to work as a

muralist in Derry! On that promising note, I bid you adieu and wish you, on behalf of Tom, Kevin and myself, a very happy day.

5. USEFUL WEBSITES

www.derrycity.gov.uk, Spartan in contact info.

www.derrycityfc.com, Derry's soccer site, all you ever wanted to know about Derry's football squad but were afraid to ask. Up to the minute.

www.geographia.com/northern-ireland/ukider00.htm, useful links to all things Northern Irish.

<http://www.donegalnews.com>, has that little village life content. BIG things happen in Donegal, mostly to fish.

<http://www.irishroots.net/Derry.htm>, for those seeking their biological origins all over Ireland. Derry's genealogy center is based in the Heritage Building where The Bogside Artists have exhibited.

<http://www.cityofderryairport.com>, simple and to the point giving the visitor what he needs to know and well presented with good flicks. Flights to Dublin, London, Glasgow, Manchester, Majorca etc.

<http://www.derryvisitor.com>, good plug for the town. I should say "city"; but Derry will never be a "city" as such, we hope! To Derry "wans", it'll always be a town.

The Bogside Artists are three men from Derry, N.Ire, known the world over for their series of murals in The Bogside. Visit their website; bogsideartists.com

MURALS

By The Bogside Artists

MURALS by The Bogside Artists

"MURALS"

(A brief excerpt from our book)

The abstract notion of 'society', much touted by politicians, is, of course, a shibboleth. Society is the sum total of human relationships especially those we designate as "role-playing". Man is a social being and his life is by definition contextual. How he relates to himself, his work, his friends, his past, his present, his future, his family and the world in general determines his life and defines him. From the wastelands of the social pariah to the media touted 'pillar of the establishment' is a broad spectrum indeed. It is a spectrum explored by satirists in general and by many of the major playwrights. Beckett's "Waiting for Godot", for example, is essentially an expose of the craziness of man as a social being. The theatre deals expressly with all aspects of social relationships. Is theatrical expression political? How can it not?

Painting deals with context quite consciously. Context is as much a theme of Manet's 'Dejeuner Sur L'herbe' as it is of Beckett's "En Attendant Godot". It is as much exemplified in Picasso's Guernica as it is in the work of Magritte and De Chirico. All art is social. All art is therefore political in essence. Whether it becomes overtly political or covertly political has as much to do with context, as it has to do with the artist himself. A portrait of Hitler would be a revered object in a Neo-Nazi's lair but in a Jewish synagogue it would be something else entirely, if indeed it managed to hang there for more than ten seconds. Just as a man can attain immediate notoriety by streaking in the wrong place at the right time

so careerists in the art world manipulate context in order to win maximum attention for themselves. Advertisers too like Benetton have not been slow to learn the trick. Therefore, to label certain artists as 'political' is simply to say they are 'overtly' political in the same way as a pickpocket is conspicuously a thief while the retailer who overcharges for his merchandise is merely a 'respected businessman'. Both are playing the same game. The word is not the thing.

How we relate to things will have a lot to say about the choices we make. After all, bigotry itself and its extreme manifestation racism, is at heart a relationship problem. The antithesis of the ugly and the beautiful is primarily a contextual problem whose parameters are always shifting. Consequently, modern art critics, bereft of any normative frame of reference in our time are all at sea as to what constitutes 'good' art and what 'bad'. Wily businessmen like Saatchi and Saatchi and unscrupulous curators everywhere are ever ready to capitalize on their ignorance and on the befuddlement of the public in general.

Since the 'scandalous' arrival of Duchamp's urinal the use of context has become a favorite weapon in the artist's armatorium. From that point of view there is really nothing new about Hirst's work. Surrealism, as a movement outside of its psychological pretensions, was pragmatically an investigation into context. In the era of New Age thinking, of course, and technological "advancement" all this seems like old hat these days but in their time these cultural statements were radical in the extreme.

In the case of The Bogside Artists the context was given. We were born into it. The site we chose to paint our murals, The Bogside, was a familiar part of our habitat. It was a daily fact of our existence, where we had lived and played, our history. It was drenched in blood. This by itself would, paradoxically and despite the blunderbuss abuse of our critics, make our work very reflective of where modern art is headed at the moment. For, it has long been an embarrassing fact to many curators that the gallery itself provides a false context for the viewing of art. The gallery in effect becomes a mediator between the viewer for whom the work was made and the artist himself. This leads to a reification of the work and a corresponding alienation of the work, the artist and his public. Art galleries therefore look wistfully at community art and the work of muralists like ourselves. They establish 'Outreach Programs' in the hope of redressing the balance. Performance artists, let us not forget, came into being explicitly to fill this gap.

With public art the modus operandi of the careerist artist whose will is to challenge the viewer on the presupposition that the viewer is actually blind and stupid, would nakedly contradict the context in which the muralist seeks to live. The muralist's first remit is to communicate; else he would not have chosen a public site in the first place. He is willingly addressing public context, public mind, public belief, public perceptions in all their variety and contradictions. He is not appealing to the dilettante or the culture vulture. He is a rebel, painting with passion because he knows that true art is poetry and poetry is not the proper arena for careerism, which rightfully belongs to the market place and its chicanery. He is appealing, first and foremost, to the man in the street, on the assumption that the man in the street is not completely blind and no crazier than the artists who address him. This is the context in which the muralist places himself. It can be thin ice to walk upon, as the experiences of The Bogside Artists will readily testify; because it involves the whole social context. There are political currents to avoid and tribal rapids to negotiate. We seek to honor the context we have been given; not to abuse it in the name of an infantile delusion of license masquerading as 'freedom' which alone characterizes

much of what passes for so-called 'contemporary art'.

William Kelly is one of The Bogside Artists. He is author of Murals. More info about the artists can be got at;www.bogsideartists.com



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