



Making Great Art Work:
Visual Arts Policy & Strategy

General Description and Context

Arts Council support is critical to the existence, development and vitality of the independent visual arts sector in Ireland, as it is an artform that does not have significant ways of generating income from alternative sources. At its core is an exceptionally dedicated constituency of individual, creative practitioners that work alone or in collaboration with peers and the public. There are a limited number of publicly-funded, dedicated visual arts galleries in Ireland and therefore, the infrastructure of multidisciplinary venues and festivals is critical to the development of the artform and its audiences.

The type of practice many visual artists undertake has developed significantly over a number of years. Increasingly, many work in areas such as socially-engaged practice, which is an expansive, collaborative and often longer-term way of delivering programmes and projects, working directly with communities of people and place. This practice requires significant investment over extended periods of time. Another form of practice that is increasingly visible internationally is large-scale, off-site projects, often driven by independent producers and curators and this has yet to be developed to a large extent in Ireland.

In addition, visual arts practice is an international practice. Irish artists are experts at working within the international context, resulting in a standard of practice that is at the top level internationally. However, considering the geographical location of Ireland it is a constant challenge to ensure that international curators see the work of Irish artists. Therefore, the continued and developing support of inbound and outbound travel both for curators and artists is critical to our growing reputation in the visual arts internationally.

The Council considers visual arts to include a range of media such as painting, drawing, sculpture, printmaking, photography, live art/performance, film, video or other digital imaging media.

In *Making Great Art Work*, the Arts Council identifies two policy priority areas: **the artist** and **public engagement**.

Visual Artists

The central position of the artist as an individual creative practitioner is a key feature of the visual arts and this independent status is a factor in many of the challenges encountered by professional artists.

A recurring challenge is the ability of artists to sustain financially viable careers. The lack of a strong industry framework and production models, outside of individual exhibiting opportunities over the lifetime of an artist's career, is problematic for working artists.

In addition, the availability of suitable and sustainable workspace has decreased dramatically in recent years, particularly in urban centres where the majority of working artists live. With the recent publication of the national development plan, *Ireland 2040*, there is an opportunity for the Arts Council to increase its advocacy and partnership role, in support of driving the development of new, dedicated and sustainable studio spaces for artists in Ireland and the continued provision of minor capital funding for existing spaces.

Currently, the Arts Council supports individual artists directly to buy creative time, to develop practice and skills and to create new work and develop projects through its **Bursary Award**, **Next Generation Award**, **Project Award**, **Arts Grant Funding** and the **Travel & Training Award**. Artist-led studios and workspaces are supported through the **Visual Artists' Workspace Scheme**. The creative development and practice of curators is supported through the **Bursary Award**. Through **Strategic Funding**, the Council also supports artists indirectly through investment in organisations which present or mediate the work of artists or which provide supports, resources, facilities and large-scale workspaces. **Arts Grants Funding** attends to a diverse range of activity and regional provision.

In further supporting artists, over the next three years, the Arts Council will...

- Work with funded organisations to develop an 'artists' policy' template which establishes principles and standards in relation to remuneration, conditions etc.
- Conduct research into the profile and practice of visual artists working in Ireland and use the findings to develop strategic ways of supporting artists throughout their career cycle
- Work as an advocate and in partnership with local authorities and other public bodies towards creating infrastructural workspaces for artists in urban centres
- Continue to purchase works by practicing artists in line with the mission statement for the collection

Public Engagement & Visual Arts

The Arts Council supports the presentation of visual arts to audiences through **Arts Grant Funding** and the **Strategic Funding** of galleries, multi-disciplinary venues and festivals and through **Projects**. While a number of significant touring exhibitions have been seen by the Irish public in recent years, the practice of touring visual arts within Ireland is in its infancy.

Currently, the practice of individual or collaborating visual artists is often the most successful way visual artists' work connects with the public, particularly through those working in socially-engaged practice or producing large-scale public work.

There remains scope for the range of programmes in venues and festivals throughout the country to further support practices that have engagement at the core of the work. This type of ambitious practice can be realised in the gallery space and/or beyond.

Currently, there is a significant variation in the quality of exhibitions spaces throughout the country.

Within these contexts, there are gaps in capacity and relevant expertise to programme, promote and mediate the visual arts. Initiatives to date have been successful in building capacity, expertise and skills at local level.

Although the visual arts is increasing in visibility in Ireland, high profile events can have a transformative impact on developing this further as evidenced internationally. Currently, there is no anchor event in the visual arts that acts as a vehicle for public recognition and celebration of the artform (e.g. Turner Prize, Prix Marcel Duchamp).

In further developing public engagement, over the next three years, the Arts Council will...

- Map and analyse the range and quality of public engagement programmes in the visual arts in venues to support mechanisms in this area
- Encourage and support venues and festivals to develop networks/increase touring partnerships
- In partnership with others, explore the feasibility of establishing a major, high profile prize for a visual artists working in Ireland
- Introduce a strategic support for building curatorial and mediation capacity in the visual arts at local level
- Ensure that the standard of exhibiting space and presentation is a priority in the support of exhibition programmes

Specific Visual Arts development areas

A range of other issues, of particular strategic relevance to visual arts are significant for the Arts Council to prioritise.

There is currently a limited amount of commissioning new work by organisations and/or independent 'producers' working in the visual arts in Ireland. This results in limited opportunities for artists to produce new work in a variety of practices and settings.

To address this, over the next three years, the Arts Council will...

- Encourage independent, large-scale production and commissioning models through existing and new funding programmes
- Open-up large-scale production/commissioning opportunities in the visual arts to organisations in receipt of Strategic Funding, Venues Funding or Partnership Funding

Socially engaged practice is deeply embedded in many visual artists' work. This work has a very specific profile, often requiring long-term funding to accommodate the building of relationships between partners, communities and the artist.

To address this, over the next three years, the Arts Council will...

- Develop ways to better support this type of embedded practice whether through the re-design of existing funding supports or the introduction of new ones

Other MGAW areas of strategic interest for visual arts

In the area of International, over the next three years, the Arts Council will...

- Continue to support artists to exhibit at the Venice Art Biennale.
- Develop incentives to bring international curators to engage and work with visual artists in Ireland.
- Introduce support for artists, curators and producers to collaborate internationally.