

## 3(A) Culture

The County is fortunate to have a number of cultural strengths in which to build and develop opportunities, containing some of the County's most significant scenery. It is a forerunner in the Cultural tourism business with its splendid county museum, a fully working windmill and visitor centre at Blennerville, a restored steam train (Tralee - Blennerville) as well as the famine ship the *'Jeanie Johnston'* concentrated in the Tralee area. Visitor centres and sites of historic interest are dotted throughout the County, Muckross House, The Skellig Experience, the Basket Island Interpretative Centre, Ardfert Cathedral Gallerus Oratory, the Barracks in Cahersiveen, A day in the Bog, Bridewell in Tarbert, Museum Chorca Dhuibne, Cill Rialaig, Cragg Caves, Rattoo Heritage Centre and Staigue Fort Exhibition Centre to name but a few.

In addition to the physical and built cultural environment, Kerry's rich cultural heritage includes the particular strengths and needs of its people and the presence of a large Gaeltacht in the County.

Kerry has a number of strengths and resources in the living contemporary arts. It is home to the National Folk Theatre of Ireland, Siamsa Tire - state of the art theatre in Tralee with satellites in Finuge and Carraig.

The county hosts a mix of touring professional theatres, music companies and number of local amateur drama productions.

The Rose of Tralee International Festival is well renowned both locally and overseas and continues to capture the imagination of television viewing audiences. The Festival, as it is known locally, is now adopting an artistic theme through such events as a film festival.

The county hosts festivals such as Writers Week in Listowel, Samhlaíocht Chiarraí and Féile na Bealtaine. The county can boast of a strong literary tradition in both English and Gaelic, having produced the likes of Peig Sayers, J B Keane, Brendan Kennelly, George Fitzmaurice, Bryan Mc Mahon and Maurice Walsh, Micheál O Shea, Sean Ó Súilleabháin, Gabriel Fitzmaurice, Pauline Bewick and Pádarig Ó Siochrú. It's home to several visual artists of National and International repute. It has strong links with the film industry having provided the location for Ryan's Daughter, Playboy of the Western World and Far and Away. Films have also being produced based on the works by Kerry Authors such as *'The Quiet Man'* by Maurice Walsh and *'The Field'* by J.B. Keane. Other resources are, the Kerry Screen Commission and the recently established Kerry Film Festival.

The public Library is a focal point for cultural activities in the community and intends to play a more active role in promoting an interest in and an appreciation of traditional and contemporary arts. It provides accommodation for arts events such as exhibitions and lectures, readings recitals and a whole host of other activities for adults and children.



## Festivals

There is a strong tradition of arts related festival/events in the County.

The nature and content of these festivals vary widely and includes:

### - Specialist Art Festivals

Féile na Bealtaine, Kerry Drama Festival, Patrick O’Keeffe Memorial Festival, Samhlaíocht Chiarraí, Sliabh Luachra Music Festival and Writers Week .

### - Festivals based on local traditions /culture

Puck Fair, various harvest Festivals and local race meetings.

### - Tourist/Commercial

*‘Welcome Home’* food and trade fairs etc. St. Patrick’s Day Parades.

## Infrastructure

### • Public exhibition space

There are public galleries in Tralee Siamsa Tíre and Samhlaíocht Chiarraí. Other public art spaces are located in St. John’s Arts Centre, Listowel and Cill Rialig near Ballinskelligs and Díseart in Dingle.

Siamsa Tíre has a dedicated gallery space which is part of the Complex which houses the National Folk Theatre of Ireland. Unlike many art centres, the gallery has a dedicated space and does not have to function as the foyer and gallery combined and is programmed by a professional Curator.

Samhlaíocht Chiarraí established in 1991, is located in Tralee. The premises include gallery and office space. Space for workshop is limited. Twelve exhibitions are shown each year.

St John’s Arts Centre, Listowel is a multi-disciplinary arts centre located in the centre of Listowel. St. John’s Arts Centre plays an important role in the cultural life of the town. The centre is based in an old church. The space available for exhibitions can therefore be limited to the entrance area depending on whether there is a theatre production programmed.

### • Public Libraries

The Arts Office of Kerry County Council in association with the County Libraries have a programme of exhibitions in Public Libraries. Public Libraries are located in Tralee, Killarney, Listowel, Caherciveen, Killorglin, Kenmare, Dingle, Ballybunion and Castleisland.

### • Díseart

This is a relatively recent initiative and is based in an old convent in Dingle. The centre offers facilities to artists to work and exhibit. It houses stained glass windows by the world renowned artist Harry Clarke.

### • Cill Rialig

Cill Rialig was originally established to offer residential studio space for artists but now includes a specialist work shop area and public gallery.

#### • Commercial Galleries

Commercial Galleries play an important part in supporting visual artists in the Kerry region. There are a high number of commercial galleries considering the size of population. A high proportion of galleries are run by artists themselves, often in display spaces adjoining their studio.

#### • Studio

In 'A Visual Arts Policy Report' for Kerry County Council 2000, 80% of artists surveyed, have studios at their own homes. Very few artists are working from rented studios. This according to the report relates to the cost of rented property and the fact that very few emerging artists settle in Kerry.

The only managed studio is Cill Rialig which is relatively isolated and offers only short-term residences to artists, most of whom do not come from Kerry. There are no other studios operated under professional management in Kerry.

#### • Education

Kerry has one post Leaving Certificate College which includes an art course designed to facilitate entry into Third Level Art Colleges.

### Key Points

Whilst Kerry has much strength in the art world, there are areas, which must be dealt with to improve the arts countywide scale. In the 'Guide to the Arts in Kerry 2000' there are a number of recommendations and issues, which includes the following:

- The lack of public spaces for exhibition in the County is having an impact on the ability of artists to exhibit.
- There are few studios available for rental. Few artists from Kerry seek or gain opportunities to work in the County.
- A need for adequate education at all levels, in relation to the appreciation of art.
- A need to recognise that the skills involved in indigenous Kerry crafts and farming methods are passed on to the younger generations.  
These include thatching, harness making, dry stone wall, building and wicker wood.
- ***The Visual Arts Policy Report also highlighted the need for a purpose built public exhibition space in Dingle, Kenmare, Killarney.***

### Supports

Traditionally in Arts the level of financial support is low:

- Towards individual artists, community groups, youth, schools,
- No studio space to encourage artists who are outside the County to return.

### Venues

There is only one modern purpose - built arts venue in the County - Síamsa Tíre in Tralee. The majority of other venues consist of community centres and halls which have inadequate seating, lighting, sound facilities and heating as a rule. The current availability and quality of performance and rehearsal spaces severely limits the range and scope of arts activities in the county, particularly in South and West Kerry.

### Visual arts

There is a need to improve facilities for artists through the provision of studios and workshops. At second level, opportunities to explore music, needs to be extended to a wider range of students. There is no third level course available in the County.

### Festivals

There are insufficient 'Street Theatre' type events.

While the county has many strengths there are also deficits, as aforementioned, many of these are outlined in the '*Guide to the Arts in Kerry*' which also contains a list of those involved. 44 involved in the Performing Arts, 87 in Visual Arts, 43 organisations, 19 venues and 65 described as other.

Source: Kerry County Council (2001)