


A Rising Tide Lifts all Boats

Everybody knows the famous painting by the Japanese artist Hokusai, ukiyo-e painter and printmaker of the Edo period. And if you think you don't – I say again – you definitely do: .

Katsushika Hokusai's *Under the Wave off Kanagawa* is also known as *The Great Wave*. It is one of the most famous works of art in the world, and is recognised as an iconic work of Japanese art. It was Hokusai's intention to produce as many copies of the print as he could. They were made quickly and sold cheaply, as he wanted as many people as possible to have access to art, to be able to have a work of art that they liked on their wall. This is why he sold them for what, at the time, would have been the equivalent of two bowls of rice. People loved the print, it was a smash hit. This was during a time when Japanese trade was heavily restricted, and in many ways, Hokusai's print was responsible for opening up a unique cultural perspective within the limitations of this economic circumstance.

Páipéar is an exhibition with 115 artists. And so it gives a broad sense of what's going on in the city right now, a city that is changing rapidly. As everybody knows from the constant protests and demonstrations that are happening, it's becoming more difficult than ever for artists to get by. With studios shutting down, grass-roots art spaces almost all gone, galleries struggling to pay overheads, and unethical decisions in the running of national art institutions, Ireland has become a very difficult place to make a living from art.

Yes. A big blockbuster show. Why not? With the intention of addressing these circumstances through the act of exhibition-making, *Páipéar* seeks to bring visibility to arts, highlighting rifts, contradictions and chasms in the market and the Irish artworld in general. By utilising the space in this way, it asks: why can't artists have permanent spaces, more stability, recognition? In return, we will ensure your trips into town will bring surprising and welcome encounters, exciting interactions and maybe the odd epiphany. We will take back the city and make it better for locals and tourists alike.

In Joyce's *Ulysses*, Dublin is celebrated, among infinite other threads and meanings, as a city of conversation, communication and culture. Part of what makes the book so captivating for people

outside of Ireland is the humour, wit and intelligence Bloom encounters on his meanderings around the city, in the people he meets. Of course these characters are largely based on people Joyce encountered himself, as he went about his life. It's sad to think about how the city's spaces of encounter are dwindling, because what so many of us love about Dublin is its character of impulsivity; this city where you needn't even bring your phone with you on a Sunday stroll because you're bound to meet people. In many ways, this aspect of Dublin city life is being packaged and marketed, but people who know the city know it's increasingly not the real deal. Frustratingly, it wouldn't take much to preserve the ecologies of cultural diversity that are the real deal.

It is true that Ireland has a wealth of brilliant artists and it is also true that they are not supported. It was discovered (and reported in the Irish Times) in 2016 that Ireland's spending on the arts, as a percentage of gross domestic product, is just one-sixth of the European average. And the situation has only gotten worse with the pandemic. Add to this a dearth of affordable housing and studios and we might get a sense of the challenges faced. On the other hand, a thriving tourist industry capitalises on international recognition of Dublin as an iconic city of culture and heritage.

Of course, it's a cliché – the hard life of the tortured artist, you choose your path and you reap what you sow. But let's consider for a minute the way that art is viewed in this country. Artists are often seen as charity cases, and taxpayers might begrudge them their perceived charmed, bohemian lifestyle. But Ireland is an anomaly in the international art market because it has such a threadbare network of support. Even though the standard is incredibly high, the lack of structuring around it means that artists compete arduously for a handful of opportunities. This causes further difficulty and division, because instead of celebrating the abundance of talent and excellence through solidarity, people are pitted against one another in the pursuit of sustaining themselves through their work. Often, when the tide rolls back after a recession, or as it did during the pandemic, only those from affluent backgrounds are left in a position to work full-time as artists. It's important to remember that when art-making is suppressed, through the obliteration of art-spaces, we lose the diversity of expression from a multitude of economic or otherwise marginalised backgrounds.

It's a culture in crisis and we might ask what we can do. *Páipéar* is an exhibition that brings together various artists at different stages of their careers and with diverse practices. In this exhibition, there is a sense of plenty, abundance, choice and accessibility. By presenting works on paper for this exhibition, *Páipéar* unites the artworks and takes a prime location in the heart of Dublin to remind us all of what creativity means to this city. To merge passers-by on Dame Street with Dublin's artistic community. The intention is to bring artists together and to reach new art collectors, whether aficionado or novice, and to advocate for the arts. It invites in new visitors, a new audience, expanding the scope of how art is experienced and enjoyed.

It's important to say at this point that, while it is exciting to discover new artists and to engage with the work that they make, and to find out more about what makes them tick, it's also important to understand the role that a collector can play in the cultural fabric of a country. And while it may be daunting to know where to begin a collection, that feeling of uncertainty is rewarded with the thrill of a great find. It's good to know that whether you choose based on advice from a friend, or from your own intuition, or based on knowing the artist personally, you now hold in your hand a unique piece that connects you to the artist and their visual language. The positivity of activism with good intention towards others also fosters camaraderie, and when it comes to art, connecting with a piece of art in this way says, yes: I hear you, I see you, I agree. Forging a community through affinity of ideas is one of the many joys of owning an artwork. Such a supportive, constructive and positive action brings joy, affirmation and reassurance that a visual language has spoken to you. There is a reciprocal recognition that you agree with each other, artist and viewer, but through the visual language of art. Assuring each other that ideas, feelings, experiences and moods have been articulated, understood and felt.

There is such a colossal amount of artworks in this exhibition, it is impossible to describe any of them in detail. However it is enjoyable to pick at random the names of exhibiting artists and be introduced to a different realm of visual experience by glancing at, perusing or getting lost in all that *Páipéar* has on offer. The artworks can change variously, depending on your mood or where you hang them – in proximity to other objects, kitchenette, hallway, or over the fireplace. And of course the light, natural light is best.

Páipéar is an exhibition that seeks to retrace the fundamentals of how artists can connect with the public in order to sustain themselves, as well as those of how the public connects with artists in

order to discover new ideas and perspectives within the work. You may find a historical remembrance, a personal credo, references to other artists and writers, a commentary on the human condition, comforting design compositions, musings on abstraction, street art, portraiture, still life, landscape, the list goes on. The artist may convey their message with humour, melancholy, remove, passion, intensity, anger, tranquillity, finesse, subversion, warmth, precision, but each work encapsulates the world of that specific artist.

Essentially this punchy, ambitious exhibition on one of Dublin's main thoroughfares asks you to come in and have a look. Much like Hokusai's *Great Wave, Paipéar* puts art right in the middle of daily experience. There are bus stops, a university, shops, pubs, restaurants, cafés, the river Liffey and its boardwalk, all nearby, and it is hoped that this exhibition will provide a context for those people wandering, meandering, passing time, meeting people or getting in out of the rain, to stop and see some great art.