

Galway Arts Centre  
Strategic Plan  
2020-2025



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Cover: **Ger Sweeney 2021**

'Decade' in partnership with Galway International Arts Festival

Photograph: Tom Flannagan



# Executive Summary

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Galway Arts Centre has been at the centre of the arts and cultural development in Galway City and County since 1982. It has been the nurturing seed bed for the origination and growth of some of Galway's most important cultural interventions including Cúirt International Festival of Literature, Galway Youth Theatre, Red Bird Youth Collective, TULCA Festival of Visual Art and Galway Theatre Festival. The gallery at 47 Dominick Street has acted as the de facto municipal gallery for over 30 years.

When it was founded in 1985, Galway Arts Centre was one of the first arts Centres outside of Dublin. As a result, it has taken a different path to the majority of arts centres that were set up by Local Authorities under various initiatives. The lack of a formal relationship with Galway City Council has been a major factor in the ongoing instability of Galway Arts Centre, alongside the challenges of maintaining listed buildings at 47 Dominick Street and 22 Nuns Island without financial support for this purpose.

This plan sets out the organisation's strategic direction for the next five years, bringing us up to 2025, outlining how Galway Arts Centre will further its three aims:

- **to provide support and opportunities for Artists to live and work in our Community**
- **to develop our Communities, engaging our audiences and participants in quality contemporary arts through our programmes and develop and strengthen the arts community**
- **to develop an effective, sustainable and resilient organisation**

Galway Arts Centre's core values have informed these aims and the objectives:

- **Freedom to Imagine**
- **Forward Thinking**
- **Collaborative**
- **Inclusive**
- **Integrity**

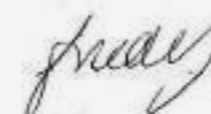
In five years, Galway Arts Centre will have a key role in developing the arts in Galway and will form part of and lead a community of arts organisations.

To achieve this, Galway Arts Centre will ensure its own sustainability by strengthening its relationship with Galway City Council and addressing organisational and financial risks.

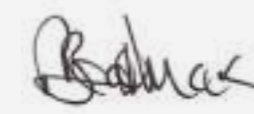
Strengthening our infrastructure will allow us to better deliver on all our activity and in so doing provide higher quality art experiences, improved support for artists, and more meaningful public engagement.

The Strategic Plan will be reviewed on an annual basis in the first quarter of the year.

Chairperson, Board of Directors



Managing Director



# Introduction: Background & Context

Founded in 1985, Galway Arts Centre is a multi-arts centre in the heart of the West End of Galway City.

Galway Arts Centre programmes comprise a year-round visual art exhibition programme featuring Irish and international artists, and delivers a multi-disciplinary education, youth arts and engagement programme that works with wide audiences, as well as minority communities including older people, people with disabilities, people in direct provision and the traveller community. Core programmes include Galway Youth Theatre which has been providing a pathway to a professional career in theatre since 1991, Red Bird Youth Collective established in 2011, Ireland's first youth-led visual art collective, and most recently, Fighting Words, which helps students to develop their writing skills and explore their love of writing. The organisation also manages Nuns' Island Theatre, a former Presbyterian Church that has been transformed into a modern 80-seater theatre. Nun's Island Theatre supports Galway Youth Theatre, Red Bird Youth Collective and Fighting Words, and is used by many young professional theatre and performing companies and practitioners in the city. Galway Arts Centre is also the proud home of Cúirt International Festival of Literature, one of Galway's flagship festivals, which celebrated 35 years in 2020.

Galway Arts Centre emerged from the Galway Arts Group which was set up to provide an outlet and opportunities of expression for Artists in 1978. The GAG founded the Galway Arts Festival in the same year and opened a temporary Arts Centre in Nuns Island in 1981. In 1982, the Galway Arts Centre became a separate organisation with the stated aim of providing a Centre for Artists in the City with particular emphasis on providing a Gallery space for visual arts. In 1987 Galway Arts Centre became a limited Company and was subsequently formally recognised as a Charity. In 1988, the City provided the former City offices at #47 Dominick St as a permanent space for the Arts in the City.

Since its inception, Galway Arts Centre has remained as a key resource for Galway's artistic community and has acted as a connector, incubator and support for many notable arts organisations in Galway, including TULCA and GTF (for more information see Track Record).

# 02



## Culture Night 2019 - Life Drawing Workshop

Additional events: AKIN Artist Collective talk and film screening; Performance from the Accidental Shaman Poet; Music from the Baytones, Katie O'Connor and Steven Sharpe  
Photograph: Eloisa Etxebarria



### **‘Burning Bright’ Annual Tea Dance 2018**

Galway Arts Centre’s programme for older people encourages participants to celebrate and engage in their own creativity. Exhibition showcases yearly as part of Bealtaine Festival

## Challenge, Growth & Development: Contextual Note

In recent years, the organisation has faced challenges which have limited its ability to achieve long term goals. These include reductions in funding and the lack of support with regards to the development and maintenance of its buildings. With the support of the Arts Council and Galway City Council, Galway Arts Centre has undergone a period of reflection and review culminating in the development of this plan. This section will outline the steps taken prior to this plan being drafted, and outline the steps taken to date to facilitate the organisation’s continued growth. In February 2019, the Board of Directors of Galway Arts Centre met with the Arts Council and Galway City Council jointly to discuss the growth and development of Galway Arts Centre. Following this meeting, Galway City Council allocated funding for an organisational review and the development of a strategic plan. In April 2019, Bonnar Keenlyside (BK) was commissioned to undertake an Organisational Review of Galway Arts Centre and support the development of a Strategic Plan.

In July 2019, the review was undertaken and included:

- a review of data and documents
- a visit and consultation with the board, management team and external stakeholders
- comparison with other organisations

In August 2019, findings from the organisational review were discussed with the Board of Directors and staff. Several key areas were identified as in need of modernisation and updating in order to meet current standards of governance and arts management practice.

In September 2019, findings from the review were used to populate a timeline to ensure governance compliance. This was submitted to the Arts Council. Any of these actions which remain outstanding have been incorporated into the action plan and timeline of this strategic plan.

The Board and staff met on a number of occasions to draft the mission, key aims and objectives of the organisation, which were finalised in consultation with Anne Bonnar at a meeting at the end of December 2019.

# Charting Progress: Milestones

## Governance

Concurrently to the development of this plan, the Board of Directors and staff team at Galway Arts Centre have been taking steps to address actions outlined in the organisational review by Bonnar Keenlyside. These include:

- Renewal of Board of Directors of Galway Arts Centre and review of roles and responsibilities
- Restructuring of financial systems and elimination of long-standing financial deficit
- Review of organisational structure

## Funding

Since the drafting of the strategic plan, Galway Arts Centre has secured a modest funding increase from Galway City Council.

## Refurbishment of Nuns Island

In July 2021, Galway City Council in partnership with Galway Arts Centre were awarded Cultural Capital Scheme funding from the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht for the refurbishment of The Manse building at Nuns Island.

This funding is for the development a cultural hub that will better resource the adjoining theatre with dressing rooms, a green room, workshop space and live-in residency space. This refurbishment aims to improve physical accessibility of the venue.

## Formalisation of leases

Galway Arts Centre are working with Galway City Council to formalise arrangements for Galway Arts Centre at 47 Dominick Street and Nuns Island Theatre.

Legal arrangements for The Manse are pending the refurbishment of the building. This is to allow Galway City Council to directly procure services for the works.

## Accessibility and Inclusion

Galway Arts Centre is highly committed to strategically developing accessibility, inclusion and diversity across all its programmes and activities.

Our second-floor galleries in 47 Dominick Street do not have lift access, which is a major accessibility issue and one that we are actively prioritising and strategically developing through a series of actions, which include working with Galway City Council to highlight and tackle these issues, seeking capital for infrastructural development, programming off site, the creation of a new role within the organisation and through digital methods.

## Capacity Building

Galway Arts Centre is undergoing a reimagining of its identity and branding. Supported by a 2021 Arts Council Capacity Grant, we are developing a new logo and website designed by Pixel Design. We will launch the new website and identity in early 2022.



**Ursula Burke 2019**  
 'The Precariat'  
 Photograph: Tom Flanagan

# Track Record

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Galway Arts Centre has supported artists and communities from and outwith Galway City to engage in contemporary arts practice and programmes, since 1985.

## **The Domestic Godless 2018**

'the Food, the Bad & the Ugly'

in partnership with Galway International Arts Festival

© Jed Niezgoda, Courtesy Crawford Art Gallery1



## The following programmes have been highlighted as areas where Galway Arts Centre excels.

### /// Sector Support

One of the first arts centres in Ireland, Galway Arts Centre played a key role in supporting the wider development of the arts sector in Galway. Examples of this include:

- its early and pivotal support in the development of companies including the Galway Theatre Festival, Decadent Theatre, Fregoli, Mephisto, There Is Bear and Anam Theatre
- its support and development of TULCA Festival of Visual Arts, which was founded at Galway Arts Centre
- Galway Arts Centre founded the Galway Theatre Festival. The festival was managed from GAC for the first three years of its existence
- its partnership support of festivals including Galway International Arts Festival and Barbóro Children's Festival
- The Director, Head of Youth Theatre and Head of Visual Arts have all played significant roles in supporting other members of the arts community over several years

In continuance of that energy Galway Arts Centre is currently working with Galway City Council to develop the Manse at Nun's Island into a hub for emerging artists and youth arts. A significant Capital Grant application for renovation of this space was awarded in July 2021.

In addition, a core objective of this plan focuses on Galway Arts Centre building on this historic sector support, bringing together arts organisations across Galway in order to build collective capacity.

### /// Visual Arts and Artist-led working

The Gallery at #47 has been the only permanent public exhibition space in the City for many years. Galway Arts Centre has placed artists at the centre of its work with several projects, including Engage and Red Bird Youth Collective, the first visual art youth-led collective in the Republic of Ireland.

The exhibition programme ensures opportunities for a wide range of artists including those who feel they are outside the current visual art discourse. It was the first gallery to exhibit Vukan Nedeljkovic's Asylum Archive and is known for working with artists from the LGBTQI+ Community.

### /// Community Engagement and Outreach

Galway Arts Centre has continued to prioritise community engagement and outreach work. Projects include: a programme with people in Direct Provision through a series of collaboratively curated events and through a participant-led gallery workshop programme; sustaining an older peoples' programme since 2004; giving talks on process; early adopters of a Vulnerable Peoples' Protection Policy; a member of the Azure Network, which supports visual art engagement for people living with Dementia.

### /// Cúirt International Festival of Literature

Cúirt has been recognised for its high-quality programme and was awarded an increase in Arts Council Funding in 2019.



**Marielle MacLeman 2019**  
'In Course of Rearrangement'



# Summary Review

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Galway Arts Centre comprises of three key functions

- A year-round multi-arts programme in #47 Dominick Street and Nuns Island Theatre, including our visual art exhibitions programme, Galway Youth Theatre and Cúirt International Festival of Literature
- A space that provides facilities for artists, companies and organisations to reside, produce and develop work, both in the workshops and gallery spaces at #47 and in Nun's Island Theatre
- Our youth, community engagement and outreach programmes, which encourage self-expression and participation in the Arts

# 05



**Ian Cumberland 2018**  
'A Brand New Darkness'  
group exhibition curated by Abridged



## Programmes

Galway Arts Centre presents a full Gallery programme with up to eight exhibitions per annum. The main programme is curated by the Head of Visual Arts. Artists have an opportunity to submit proposals through an annual open submissions policy. Through this process, artists are identified and supported with mentoring and studio visits to develop an exhibition in future years. The Gallery space is also programmed in partnership at several points throughout the year. Currently, partners include Galway International Arts Festival, Saolta Arts, TULCA Festival of Visual Arts, Baboró, and Bealtaine Festival. In recent years the Gallery has also presented in-house exhibitions from Red Bird Youth Collective. The building is used as meeting rooms for community groups, classes, resident associations, environmental and advocacy groups, as well as for rehearsals, auditions, works in progress performances and readings. The Gallery is also used as pop-up studio space for artists in between exhibitions.

From top

### Galway Arts Centre

Gallery tour Rang 5 Scoil Iognáid

### Nuns Island Theatre

NØÖV performance at Nun's Island Theatre 2021. A Livefeed youth music project in partnership with Galway 2020 European Capital of Culture  
Image: Leo Seoighthe

### Red Bird Youth Collective

'Waking Playthings' A collaboration between Red Bird Youth Collective, performance artist Dominic Thorpe and sound artist Vicky Langan

### Cúirt International Festival of Literature

### Galway Youth Theatre

Galway Youth Theatre 'Dead School'

### Fighting Words

### The Manse at Nuns Island

## 06



### The Karibu Art Exhibition 2018

Opening night of the group exhibition by Congolese artists presented by the Galway African Diaspora in partnership with Galway 2020 European Capital of Culture

## Environmental Analysis

### Audience

Galway city population is around 79,000 with over 62,000 additional people living within 30 minutes drivetime. Within the city, Galway East has the largest and most diverse population including many of Galway's new communities; 25% of the city's population are students. 18.6% of the population are non-Irish nationals. The Galway Gaeltacht has a higher proportion of Irish speaking inhabitants (75.2%) than all other Gaeltacht areas in the country combined (69.5%).

Galway saw over 1.67m international tourists in 2017 and over 1m from within Ireland and many are attracted by the culture of the city. 3.2. Galway is defined in part by its rich artistic and cultural resources and the commitment of partners to cultural sustainability. The city's cultural profile, activity, venues, education and creative community has flourished and grown exponentially since GAC began in 1985. The city is now home to a large and diverse artistic, creative and cultural community.

As noted in Galway City's Culture and Creativity Strategy:

**“Galway is a vibrant, diverse city. It is a city of learning, a city of youth, a city of rich cultural heritage and of stunning natural environment. Galway is a creative city where everybody matters. Galway City Council aims to position Galway as a world-class city of innovation and creativity. We want to create a city that people aspire to live in, to work in and to visit...Culture is also an intrinsic element of our economic, environmental and social sustainability and the development of all four elements in the city and in the region will inter-link and enhance our lives and the lives of children and young people who wish to live and work in this region throughout their lives”**

# Strategic Direction: Mission, Values, Aims, Objectives

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## Our Mission: Statement of Purpose

Our mission is to play a lead role in providing year-round access to all communities in Galway to engage with artists in ambitious, original and innovative contemporary arts practice both in a multi-disciplinary and inclusive creative hub and in the community.

## Our Core Values

FREEDOM TO IMAGINE    COLLABORATIVE    INTEGRITY  
FORWARD-THINKING    INCLUSIVE

## Our Aims

- 1 To provide **support and opportunities** for artists to live and work in our community (through our programmes)
- 2 To **develop our communities**, engaging our audiences and participants in quality contemporary arts through our programmes and developing and strengthening the arts community
- 3 To develop an **effective, sustainable and resilient organisation**

**'But Still, Like Dust, I'll Rise' 2018**

film and performance with Isabella Oberlander,  
Áine Phillips, Vicky Smith and Lisamarie Johnson



# 1 Support and Opportunities

We aim to provide **support and opportunities** for artists to live and work in our community (through our programmes)



## 'Furthermore' by AKIN 2019

Margaret Irwin West, Leonie King

Group exhibition also featuring works from

Jay Murphy and Dolores Lyne

Photograph: Tom Flannagan

## Objectives

To deliver a high-quality artistic programme that supports artists and creates opportunities for them to develop and showcase work

To build upon our existing programmes, developing in the areas of partnerships, training and development, youth arts and community engagement

To establish Nuns Island Theatre as a hub for artistic activity, supporting emerging artists and companies to develop and stage new work across artforms

## How we will advance our Aim and Objectives

We will deliver a year-round programme of visual arts, literature, theatre and cross-artform activity, including events, exhibitions, and existing programmes. We will maintain and build upon existing partnerships for the delivery of these programmes

We will provide artists with access to professional development and training opportunities. We will mainstream and develop our youth arts programme

We will develop and maintain a multi-purpose, well-equipped, accessible building encompassing Nun's Island and the Manse

## Outcomes

A continually vibrant and high-quality programme, that is cohesive and integrates our work across artforms and audience groups (including youth arts) and positively impact on people's lives

Established, working programmes in youth arts and artist training/development, delivered intelligently within the greater annual programme of activity at GAC and in partnership with organisations that share our aims. Artists feel the training and development opportunities support their career development. Young people engage positively with youth arts programme and are impacted positively

Galway Arts Centre has robust and rewarding partnerships with local and national organisations

Nun's Island Theatre and Cultural Arts Hub (the Manse) is an accessible, functional building that supports the Galway Arts Centre programme. Emerging artists have access to space to develop and showcase work

## 2 Develop our Communities

We aim to **develop our communities**, engaging our audiences and participants in quality contemporary arts through our programmes and developing and strengthening the arts community

### Objectives

To develop audiences for Galway Arts Centre and increase engagement with more diverse communities across the city (including the East side)

To develop our partnerships across Galway City, in order to bring arts organisations together and build collective capacity for the arts in Galway

To better communicate the key messages and activities of Galway Arts Centre, and strengthen our profile in the city

### How we will advance our Aim and Objectives

We will find out more about our current audiences and build a picture of our reach and who we are not reaching to inform programming. We will devise an Equality and Human Rights plan in response to the above, identifying target communities for future community-centred programmes. We will commit to Irish language activity across all our programmes

We will act as convener and facilitator, identifying opportunities for shared working, gaps in expertise and areas for development

We will devise a communications strategy and implementation plan for the organisation to include a central communications role within the organisation

### Outcomes

Galway Arts Centre has a comprehensive understanding of the audiences that engage with its programmes and is able to develop new projects in response to this.

Audiences and users are impacted positively and profoundly by GAC events and activities, and GAC is able to evidence the impact of this. Galway Arts Centre has targeted plans for

building engagement across audiences, including audience development, Equality and Human Rights, and Irish language audiences

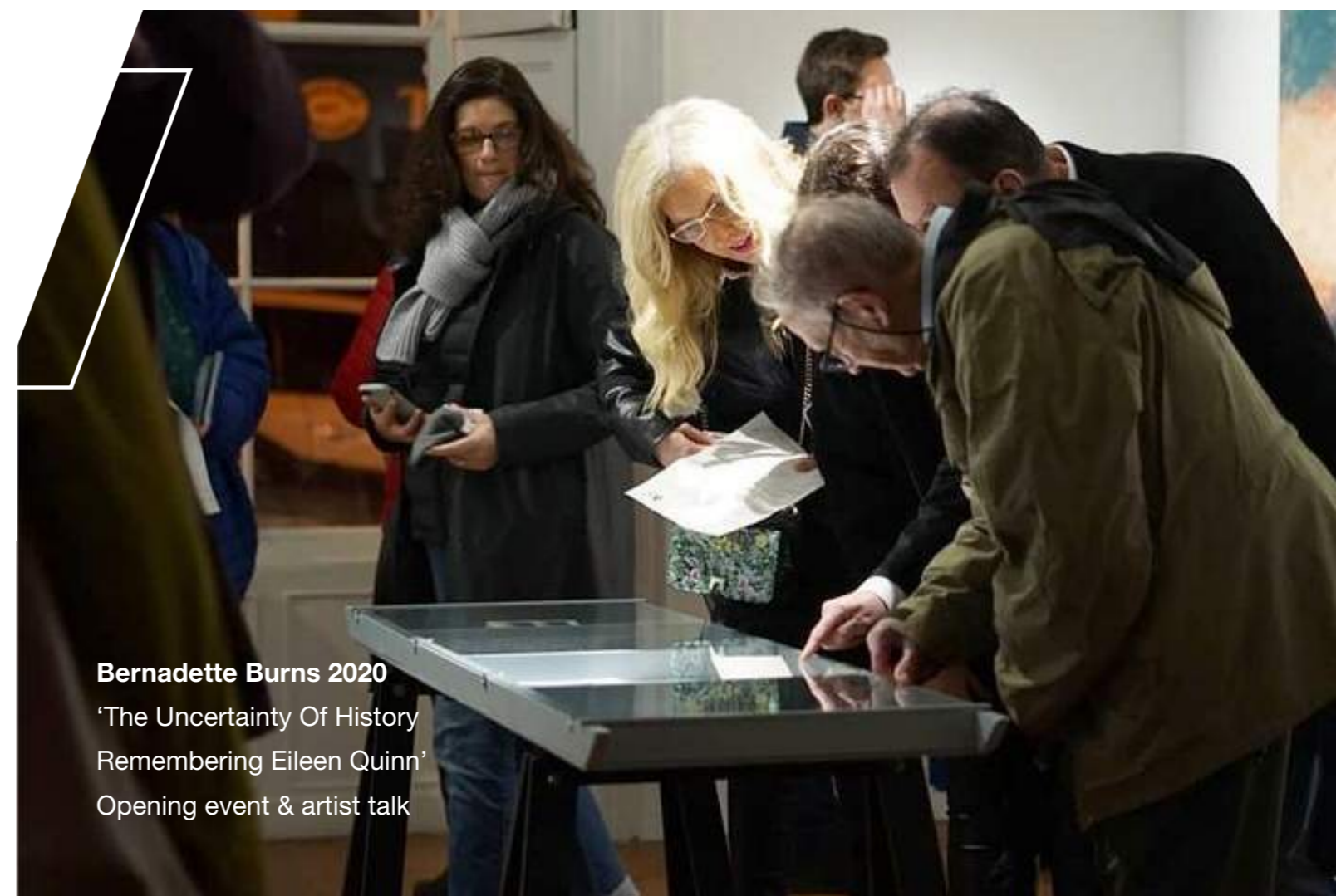
Galway Arts Centre works in partnership with appropriate community organisations in order to build its audiences. Galway Arts Centre is able to evidence the diversifying of its audience demographics

Galway Arts Centre has a key role in developing the arts in Galway. Communications are improved across Galway Arts sector. Galway Arts Centre forms part of and leads a community of arts organisations who work together to build engagement, increase collective capacity, share knowledge/skills and collaborate on artistic and strategic projects

Organisations are better able to collectively advocate for their needs to funders and stakeholders, are better able to work together to secure funding. Resources of GMIT and NUIG to arts maximised

Galway Arts Centre has a strong profile locally, regionally and nationally

Audiences, the public and stakeholders at local and national level are aware of GAC, its programmes and its value and impact



**Bernadette Burns 2020**

'The Uncertainty Of History  
Remembering Eileen Quinn'  
Opening event & artist talk

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## 3 Effective, Sustainable & Resilient Organisation

We aim to develop an **effective, sustainable and resilient organisation**

### Objectives

To strengthen the organisational infrastructure of Galway Arts Centre, including board and staff, in order to improve governance, oversight and monitoring, and in order to increase management capacity and capability

To improve the financial management of the organisation, in order to increase sustainability and financial resilience, increase income generation for the organisation and clear the deficit

To ensure that facilities and programmes are accessible, vibrant and support a more diverse business model, creating a year-round contemporary arts space for Galway post 2020

### How we will advance our Aim and Objectives

We will undertake board review and renewal, including a skills audit and setting of skills/artform/diversity targets. We will streamline processes, procedures and agreements, both internal and external

We will build up a financial culture of reliability. We will develop a fundraising strategy informed by the Arts Council's RAISE initiative

Improve accessibility in existing buildings where possible and ensure that all future buildings used in our work are compliant with national best practice. Identify how our spaces could support more diverse business models, and what would need to happen to support this

### Outcomes

Galway Arts Centre is a fit for purpose, appropriately resourced and structured organisation, with a trained and confident staff and board

Galway Arts Centre has a diverse and equipped Board of Directors, who understand their role and how they support GAC's vision



**The Melting Pot Luck Cultural Medley 2018**  
Multicultural music and performance event in partnership  
with Galway 2020 European Capital of Culture

Galway Arts Centre has a clear and comprehensive set of organisational systems that allow staff to deliver on its programmes and strategic aims 1 and 2

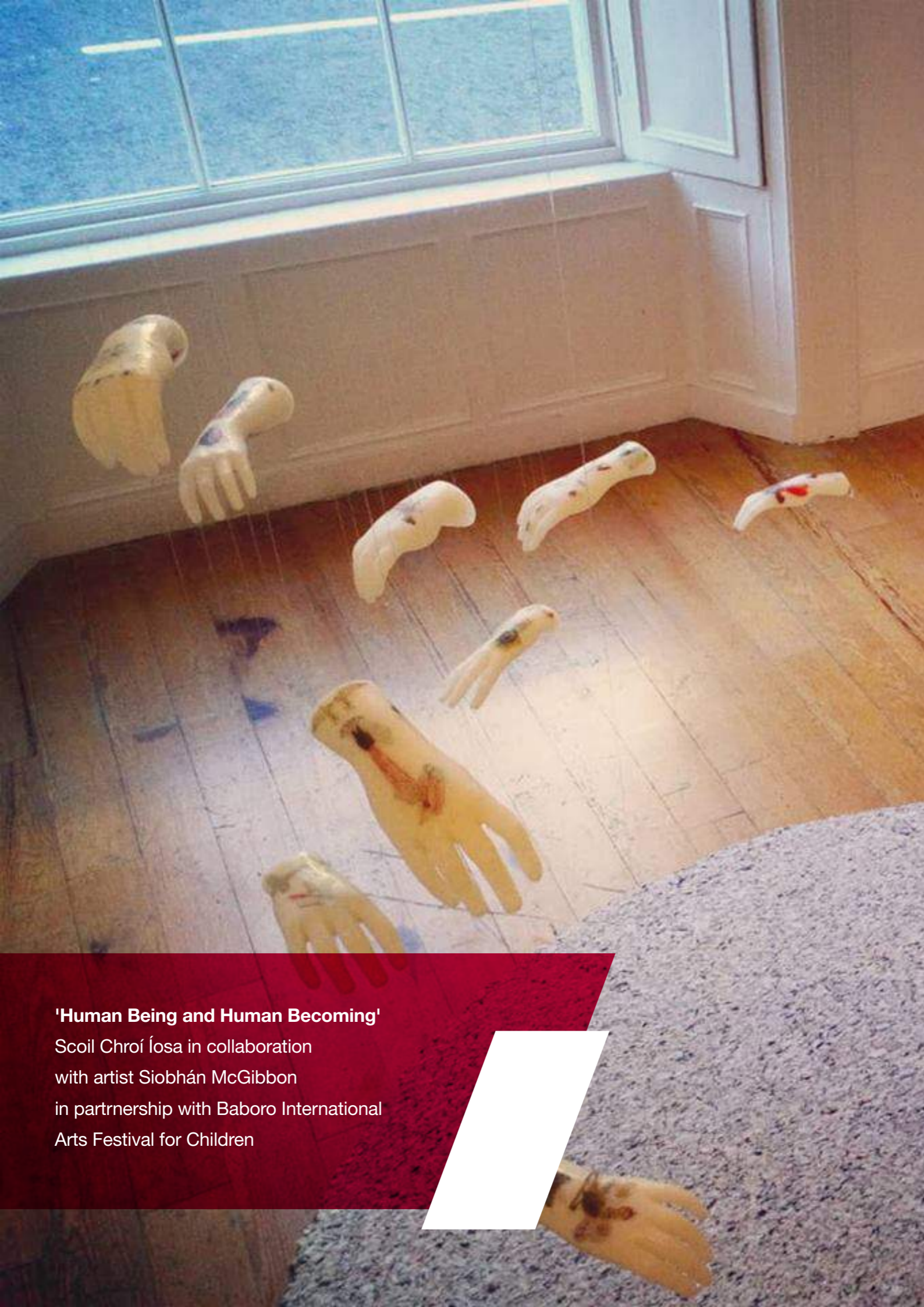
Galway Arts Centre has a clear and comprehensive set of financial systems in place, that allows the Board to have appropriate financial oversight, staff to have a clear understanding of their budgets and for staff and board to support the financial management of the organisation

Galway Arts Centre has a diverse set of income streams, including long-term, sustainable unrestricted income for the organisation

Galway Arts Centre is in a positive financial position and is well placed to weather future challenges and potential growth

Galway Arts Centre has accessible buildings, and a plan for access for any areas where access is an issue

Galway Arts Centre has a diverse set of income streams and continues to explore opportunities for growth



**'Human Being and Human Becoming'**

Scoil Chroí Íosa in collaboration  
with artist Siobhán McGibbon  
in partnership with Baboro International  
Arts Festival for Children

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## Board of Directors of Galway Arts Centre

Fiona Neary (Chairperson)

Máiread Feeney (Secretary)

Vincent Browne

John Caulfield

Celine Curtin

Mike O'Halloran

Alannah Robins

## Galway Arts Centre Team

Director / Curator Megs Morley

General Manager Tara O'Connor

Finance Officer Karen Quinn

Technical Manager David Finn

Marketing and Communications Officer Jane Hanberry

Residencies and Buildings Officer Siobhán Singleton

Galway Youth Theatre Director Andrew Flynn

Cúirt Director Sasha de Buyl

Cúirt Programme Manager Aisling O'Riordan

Community Employment Supervisor Derval Byrne

Assistant CE Supervisor Trish Heaney





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