

Le Chéile: a Welsh-Irish collaborative project -communication through printmaking

By Pamela de Brí, Irish Coordinator.

This project is a collaboration between an independent artist-led studio, the Leinster Printmaking Studio, based in Co. Kildare, Ireland, and a university affiliated studio, the Regional Print Studio in Wrexham, North East Wales. It is a cross-cultural project involving two Celtic countries with the same roots and similar traditions with three languages: Irish, Welsh and English.

“Le Chéile” project recognises the importance of sharing and accepting cultural diversity between the two countries while dealing with the limitations of verbal communication. The spoken word can often lead to misinterpretations, whereas visual language crosses these boundaries.

The collaboration was initiated in August 2004 when Steffan Jones-Hughes, from the Regional Print Studio in Wrexham, visited Ireland on a CCAT Interreg Go and See grant. He met with Margaret Becker in the Leinster Printmaking Studio and they talked about the potential for some sort of print exchange. In October 2006 discussions were followed by exchange visits between artists in both studios.

The seed for this project lay with John Berger's account of his communication through drawing with Marisa Camino. They found the lack of a common (verbal) language an advantage. Twinning with a Welsh partner we began a similar dialogue, where some of us have tried to communicate only through the image. Themes of land, language and place emerged as starting points for this dialogue. It has been both an invigorating and a challenging experience. The work was, and continues to be exchanged by email or post, in notebooks or as first proofs.

What makes this collaboration especially different is the fact that the artists are not working in the same physical space and therefore the work is produced sequentially. There is no face-to-face communication, no interruptions of dialogue, no discussion, and no immediate response. The collaborating artist responds to the work in front of him/her. The work develops at a distance, slowly. Therefore, because of this delayed response, the project is a long term one which is now entering its next phase.

New participants have come on board in Ireland, in Wales and now in Australia. This next phase, while encouraging continued collaborations between established partners, consists of opening up the project to elicit responses to any image by any of the artists, thus encouraging visual dialogue between any two, three or group of participants.

The project has received some funding from Wales Art International and CCAT Interreg. The Welsh artists have received additional support from Networking Artists Networks, (a-n magazine). Both groups have had curatorial support; on the Irish side Geraldine O Reilly, artist and member of Aosdána and on the Welsh side Steffan Jones- Hughes, artist and co-ordinator of the Regional Print Centre.

Also complementing this project has been a series of workshops in both studios.

In May 2008 a three-week exhibition was held at Riverbank Arts Centre, Newbridge, Co Kildare, Ireland, which showcased work in progress from this exciting collaboration. A promotional publication was also launched at the exhibition.

In June 2008 a blog was set up for participants and other interested to access the latest news regarding the project. www.a-n.co.uk

The first exhibition to show some of the completed work from this project was held at The Graphic Studio, Dublin, on 12th March 2009 and a second will be held in the Alternative Arts venue in Tallaght in June.

Irish participants in project, April 09:

Margaret Becker, Monica de Bath, Pamela de Brí, Rebecca Homfray, Eileen Keane, Liam O'Broin, Deirdre Shanley.

Le Chéile – comh-thionscadal Breathnach-Éireannach – cumarsáid trí dhéanamh priontaí.

D'eascair an tionscadal seo ó chuntas a thug John Berger ar a chumarsáid le Marisa Camino trí mheán na líníochta. Ba chabhair dóibh nach raibh teanga chomónta ar bith acu.

Tar éis nasc a dhéanamh le páirtí Breathnach, thosaigh gach duine againn ar agallamh den chineál céanna, cuid againn, Éireannaigh nó Breathnaigh, ag iarraidh cumarsáid a dhéanamh trí mheán na híomhá amháin, ach bhraitheamar deacrachtaí anseo toisc go bhfuil an Béarla mar theanga chomónta againn go léir.

Tháinig téamaí ar nós talamh, teanga agus áit chun cinn mar thús-phointí don amharc-chumarsáid. As sin, agus muid ag obair le priontaí agus líníochtaí, thosaigh colláisi agus ríomh-phostanna ag taisteal thar Muir Éireann soir is siar, gach ealaíontóir ag freagairt don obair a chuireadh a chomhleacaí chuige nó chuici.

Pamela de Brí agus Alison Craig atá ag déanamh comhordú ar an tionscadal, tacaíocht choimeádaithe tugtha ag Geraldine O Reilly (Éire) agus Steffan Jones-Hughes (An Bhreatain Bheag).