



BEARING WITNESS IN TURBULENT TIMES

**THE URGENCY OF SOCIALLY
ENGAGED ART AND COMMUNITY PRACTICE**

Bearing Witness in Turbulent Times - The Urgency of Socially Engaged Art and Community Practice

Wednesday 30th September 2026

Schedule

- 12pm: Welcome
- 12.05pm: *On Law and Literature, On Justice and Hope*
- Philippe Sands
- 12.30pm: Q/A moderated by Martin O'Brien, Director, Social
Change Initiative, Belfast
- 1pm: *Bearing Witness, Taking Collective Action*
- panel discussion
- 1.45pm: Lunch
- 2.30pm: Hive Choir
- 2.40pm: *Multi-Story Act II* with Artist Evelyn Broderick and
HAN (Housing Action Now)
- 3.10pm Screening: *Weaving the Present, Shaping the
Future* by Khaled Barakeh in collaboration with
Anaka Women's Collective, and Participation and
the Practice of Rights
- 3.20pm: *The Border Defines This Space* - Dylan Quinn
Dance Theatre (DQDT)
- 3.50pm: *Socially Engaged Art and the Public
Practice of Reconciliation*
- 4.20pm: Closing words
- 4.30pm: Post Symposium Drinks Reception – Tall Gallery

Bearing Witness in Turbulent Times - The Urgency of Socially Engaged Art and Community Practice

This timely gathering brings together artists, activists, policymakers, human rights researchers and social change actors to examine the **urgency of socially engaged art and community practice** – to consider how these intersecting fields can bear witness during increasingly turbulent times.

The programme will begin with a keynote address, followed by a panel discussion in addition to live case studies, collective reflection, and opportunities for networking.

12pm Welcome

12.05pm Philippe Sands - *On Law and Literature, On Justice and Hope*

Drawing on his practice as an international lawyer, and his experience researching and writing books from *East West Street* (2016) to *The Last Colony* (2022), as well as his forthcoming book *The Fifth Crime - On Ecocide, Justice and Hope* (April 2027), Philippe Sands explores the role of law and literature in recounting stories, and their interplay in delivering the possibility of justice.

12.30pm Q/A moderated by Martin O'Brien, Director, Social Change Initiative, Belfast

1pm Bearing Witness, Taking Collective Action

Participation and the Practice of Rights (PPR) work with communities across the North of Ireland to expose human rights injustices turning lived experience into collective action.

This panel, moderated by activist and academic Azadeh Sobout, features PPR's Anti-Racism Organiser Twasul Mohammed and Take Back the City Organiser Conal Mac Mathúna. They will discuss their ongoing activism in relation to housing injustice and racial violence to the struggle for belonging and the right to the city. Drawing on PPR's **Kind Economy** and **Take Back the City** campaigns and the work with the **Anaka Women's Collective** in the response to recent racist violence and anti-migrant riots in Belfast.

1.45pm Lunch

2.30pm Hive Choir

John D'Arcy, director of HIVE Choir, invites the audience to create a vocal collective to share ideas, improvise and form a polyphony. HIVE Choir is a vocal ensemble based in Belfast. It is a testing ground for alternative musical notation, text scores, vocal improvisation and sound games.

2.40pm *Multi-Story Act II with Artist Evelyn Broderick's and HAN (Housing Action Now)*

HAN (Housing Action Now) have been collaborating with artist Evelyn Broderick on 'The Great Housing Crisis Caravannette of Revolt'. The collaboration includes a wide range of housing activists responding to the growing need for solidarity within the area of housing justice. The project's vision is to build community solidarity by uniting polarized groups affected by the shared injustice of housing neglect. HAN aims to bridge divides through artistic collaborations and collective action. This session will give an overview of the collaboration between artists, activists, and community members in their evolution as an artistic collective, together with the injustices of housing and ensuring the sustainability of the project. Multi-Story Act II is supported by Create—the national development agency for collaborative arts—through the Artist in the Community (AIC) Project Realisation Award 2025.

3.10pm *Screening: Weaving the Present, Shaping the Future by Khaled Barakeh in collaboration with Anaka Women's Collective, and Participation and the Practice of Rights.*

Commissioned by the MAC in partnership with co-culture funded by Cultural Bridge.

3.20pm *The Border Defines This Space, Dylan Quinn Dance Theatre (DQDT)*

The border defines this space ... indeed a border defines any space but 'ours' defines it more than many. Defining who we are, who we think we are and who others think we are. It shapes the work we do at DQDT at least in part because across it we view what we are not. We are not Culturally Confident ... indeed we cannot be so because as a collective, we cannot agree on who we are. And while that suits our political system, as we Bear Witness in Turbulent Times, how we witness and also intervene to redefine these times is of significant importance and what I seek to explore.

3.50pm *Socially Engaged Art and the Public Practice of Reconciliation*

Eight socially engaged artists will present ideas and blueprints for public art projects through the cross-border incubator *Socially Engaged Art and the Public Practice of Reconciliation*. The programme invites artists to investigate, experiment with, and collaboratively develop approaches to reconciliation, understood as a contested practice shaped by communities' complex lived experiences. Four artists from the North of Ireland and four from the Republic of Ireland were selected for their distinctive practices across film, photography, live performance, architecture, and site-specific installation. Working creatively and collaboratively with individuals and communities, they explore places and everyday experiences that highlight the need for different forms of social change. This project is funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Reconciliation Fund and the Bertha Foundation.

Participating artists: Anushiya Sundaralingam, Evelyn Broderick, Thomas Wells, Nollaig Molloy, Kerrie Hanna, Philip Ryan, Marta Dyczkowska, Silvina Sisterna.

Co-curated by Learning Lab Agency, the MAC and Kate O'Shea.

4.20pm *Closing words*

4.30pm *Post Symposium Drinks Reception – Art, Live Music and Connecting*

To close the symposium, a drinks reception will be served in the Tall Gallery. Symposium delegates will be welcomed to the gallery by Hugh Mulholland, MAC Creative Director for Visual Art. Hugh will introduce us to *A Feeling in the Blood* which was programmed by the MAC to coincide with Belfast Trad Fest and Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann, offering a fluid, participatory and collaborative space.



Participation and the Practice of Rights **Kind Economy** Campaign



THE RIGHT TO THE CITY 2025 by Marta Dyczkowska, Photo: Paul Moore



Anything to Declare Dylan Quinn Dance Theatre
Photograph by Sarah Little (Liberty Studios)



Weaving the Present, Shaping the Future 2023 by Khaled Barakeh in collaboration with Anaka Women's Collective and Participation and the Practice of Rights, co-commission by the MAC and co-culture.

Biographies

Philippe Sands KC FRSL FBA (Hon)

Philippe Sands KC is Professor of the Public Understanding of Law at University College London and Samuel and Judith Pizar Visiting Professor of Law at Harvard Law School. He is a practising barrister at 11 Kings Bench Walk, who appears as counsel before international courts and tribunals. He sits as an arbitrator in international investment disputes and on the Court of Arbitration for Sport and served as a CAS arbitrator at the Paris 2024 Olympic Games. He is author of *Lawless World* (2005) and *Torture Team* (2008) and numerous academic books on international law, and writes occasionally for publications, including the *New York Review of Books*, the *Financial Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Observer* and *The New York Times*. His recent books include the Lviv trilogy - *East West Street: On the Origins of Crimes Against Humanity and Genocide* (2016) (winner 2016 Baillie Gifford Prize, the 2017 British Book Awards Non-Fiction Book of the Year, and the 2018 Prix Montaigne); *The Ratline: Love, Lies and Justice on the Trail of a Nazi Fugitive* (2020); *38 Londres Street: On Pinochet in England and a Nazi in Patagonia* (2026) - and *The Last Colony: A Tale of Exile, Justice and Britain's Colonial Legacy* (2022). Philippe served as President of English PEN (2018-2023) and as a member of the Board of the Hay Festival of Arts and Literature (2018-2024).

Martin O'Brien - Director, Social Change Initiative (SCI), Belfast

Martin worked for 11 years at the Atlantic Philanthropies during which he was Senior Vice President with responsibility for global grant making programmes on Health, Ageing, Children and Youth, and Reconciliation and Human Rights. He led the planning process for the conclusion of Atlantic's programmatic grant making. He has experience of working in the USA, South Africa, Ireland, Viet Nam and Cuba. Martin is also a seasoned activist for social change having worked for over 30 years in the peace and human rights movement in Northern Ireland. He led the Committee on the Administration of Justice (CAJ), which campaigned locally and internationally to advance human rights in Northern Ireland.

Bearing Witness, Taking Collective Action

**Dr. Azadeh Sobout, Research Fellow, Queens University
Belfast - School of Natural and Built Environment**

Azadeh Sobout's research has centred on the complex encounters between critical urban studies, radical geography and transitional justice processes, engaging with post-war geographies, geographies of (in)justice and displacement, and decolonial epistemologies. She combines research-based teaching and action learning from several contested urban geographies in South/West Asia, the Balkans and Ireland with a focus on non-conventional urbanisms, continuous displacement and migration, spatial violence and housing justice.

Twasul Mohammed, Anti-Racism Organiser, *Participation and the Practice of Rights*

Twasul Mohammed is a dedicated campaign organiser at Participation and the Practice of Rights in Belfast, where they contribute to campaigns around housing, the right to work, and mental health for all residents of Northern Ireland. While their role primarily focuses on supporting refugees and asylum seekers, Twasul also works with local communities on these vital issues. Having witnessed and actively resisted repression in their home country of Sudan as a peace and justice activist, Twasul is deeply committed to fostering democracy and participation. As a founding member of the Anaka Women's Collective, Twasul also works to create spaces for collective action and empowerment.

**Conal Mac Mathúna – Take Back the City Organiser,
*Participation and the Practice of Rights (PPR)***

Conal is a 25-year-old community worker born and raised in West Belfast involved in his community since leaving school as a volunteer or by paid labour, engaged in local politics and local foodbanks, gathering collections and delivering food to people in need. Since 2020, Conal has held paid roles within the community sector, from an advice worker to the regional organiser of CATU (Ireland's largest Tenant and Community Union). He has been employed by PPR since April 2025 leading their Housing and land justice campaign. Conal is active as a volunteer in CATU and local Republican politics, as well as through community football teams and community garden initiatives.

HAN Multi Story Act II

HAN (Housing Action Now) are a coalition of community workers which includes representatives from renters' unions, those working with asylum seekers, refugees, traveller organisations, housing and homelessness and those in the student and disability accommodation housing sectors. HAN recognizes deep divisions within communities caused by misinformation, racism, and far-right rhetoric, often exacerbated by the housing crisis. This crisis creates fear and scarcity, fuelling disinformation and undermining community cohesion. HAN has been in existence for almost 10 years; its sole purpose is to contribute to the development and implementation of a housing system which works for all the people who reside in Ireland.

***The Border Defines This Space - Dylan Quinn
Dance Theatre (DQDT)***

Dylan Quinn

Dylan has been Artistic Director of Dylan Quinn Dance Theatre since 2010 and a dance artist for over 30 years. He has worked nationally and internationally as a Choreographer, Dancer, Movement Director and Facilitator. Dylan has an academic background in Peace and Conflict Studies and a significant focus of his work relates to the social, cultural and political context of his environment. Dylan has for many years being engaged in a wide range of participatory work and reflective dance practice and has a strong commitment to supporting the development of dance within his local context.

Socially Engaged Art and the Public Practice of Reconciliation

Evelyn Broderick's practice MAKING|THINKING takes the form of an open dialogue evolving through the interactions of the communities she engages with. Evelyn works in a socially engaged way exploring the role of making as a form of tacit knowledge in both social & collective contexts. Recent projects include The People's Shed, ongoing since 2020 currently in the TEST SPACE residency at Limerick City Gallery of Art; The Great Housing Crisis Caravannette of Revolt with Housing Action Now; Public Art Liaison for Dolphin House; and residencies at Fire Station Artists' Studios, Common Ground's Studio468, and UCD Parity Studios.

Thomas Wells (he/they) is an artist, curator and researcher based in Belfast. Their practice centres socially engaged practice as a methodology, often working within LGBTQIA+ communities to investigate collective experience from the perspective of assembly. They are currently a PhD researcher at The Belfast School of Art. In 2017 they joined Array Studios and later helped to establish Array Collective in 2021. Recent projects include the ongoing collaboration with artist Emma Brennan, *The House of Atreus*, a queer/feminist performance collective exploring class in relation to architecture and evolving cities, located at Pallas Projects Dublin in the form of a three-week residency project in Dublin 8.

Kerrie Hanna's practice is socially engaged with projects centred on community arts, peace building, mental health and wellbeing. Kerrie has worked on co-design facilitation projects with National Gallery of Ireland, the MAC, Belfast City Council, National Trust, Ulster University and Education and Library Board. A recipient of Botanic Gardens Residency 2026, Tyrone Guthrie Residency 2025, Curator Space Residency 2025, Ballinglen Arts Foundation Residency 2024, the MAC Community Artist In Residence 2023 and Malone College Artist in Residence 2023. Before establishing her own studio, Kerrie studied stained glass painting skills when working on heritage restoration and on commissions at Glassmarque Design.

Nollaig Molloy is a visual artist working in moving image, publications, sound, printmaking and sculptural installation. She examines land use in industrial, social, and historical contexts with an interest in archives, place and working with people. She explores how fact, fiction, and close observation shapes our shifting relationship with the natural world. In 2026 she completed a Technical Development Research Residency at Leitrim Sculpture Centre. In 2025 she received a Visual Arts Bursary from The Arts Council of Ireland and was also awarded Creative Ireland funding for 'Powerhouses', a reflective radio documentary examining community volunteering in Ballaghaderreen, County Roscommon.

Marta Dyczkowska is a Polish-born, Belfast-based artist working across film, photography, installation, and performance. Her practice blends the personal with the political, exploring intersections of memory, material culture, architecture, and social change. Drawing on archives, found objects, and remnants of material culture as sites of research and reflection, her work considers how spaces/communities evolve over time. Dyczkowska investigates shifting dynamics within her own life and the wider community, approaching her practice through empathy, care, and collaboration. Her recent work, *Hearsay at Point Zero*, was commissioned by the MAC and shown within 'The State of Belfast' exhibition alongside 'Grenfell' by Steve McQueen.

Philip Ryan is a socially engaged visual artist with a background in architecture and is the co-founder of Nocht Studio. His practice combines participation, spatial design, fabrication, and digital tools to explore relationships between place, ecology, labour and community. Notable projects include this/OUR, Idir an Dá Linn, KinStools, Shift Citr and WaterSheds. His work often develops through long-term collaboration, situated research and collective making, with a particular interest in ecological civics, rural infrastructures and communities of entanglement. He was a New European Bauhaus Prizes 2025 finalist and is a recipient of an Arts Council Participatory Arts Bursary Award 2026.

Anushiya Sundaralingam is a full-time artist and facilitator dedicated to a continually evolving practice. Anushiya was born in Sri Lanka and has been based in Belfast since graduating from Ulster University in 1998. Her multidisciplinary work spans multi-layered printmaking, mixed media, sculpture, and installation art in two- and three-dimensional forms. Influenced by her heritage and surroundings, she experiments with materials and methods to create works rich in meaning, balancing innovation and tradition. Anushiya has received numerous prestigious awards and exhibited widely in local and international solo and group shows, with pieces held in public and private collections. Alongside her studio practice, she leads collaborative projects and community workshops.

Silvina Sisterna is an Argentine-born, Dublin-based artist who's socially engaged practice explores migration, memory, identity and belonging through photography, walking and participatory processes. Working collaboratively with migrant and women's communities, she creates spaces for shared reflection, dialogue and storytelling. Her practice draws on experimental photographic processes and on walking as a feminist and embodied methodology. Silvina holds an MA in Fine Art from TU Dublin and has exhibited and developed projects across Ireland and internationally. Her work is grounded in collective knowledge-making, exploring how personal and shared experiences can shape understandings of place, community and belonging.

Kate O'Shea is a socially engaged artist working across printmaking, archiving, installation, performance, and publishing, with an emphasis on collaboration and building networks of solidarity. In 2026, she presented Mycelium at VISUAL Carlow, an immersive installation bringing together textiles, sculpture, sound, and artist-made books, marking a significant point in her long-term project Mycelium: An Archive of Archives and Archivists. In 2025, she undertook a residency exchange between Irish Museum of Modern Art and Fremantle Arts Centre, on Whadjuk Noongar Boodjar Country in Walyalup, Western Australia, developing JUMP CUTS with Aideen O'Donovan. She is cofounder of transdisciplinary collective Broken Fields and Durty Books publishing house.

Symposium Co-Curators

Elaine Forde is Creative Learning & Engagement Manager at the MAC Belfast. Before joining the MAC, Elaine was Head of Engagement at The Playhouse, Derry, and Director of Artlink, Donegal. She holds a Postgraduate Certificate in Arts Management from Ulster University, a Masters Degree in Fine Art from Chelsea College of Arts, and a BA (Hons) in Fine Art from Ulster University. She has been awarded fellowships from Social Change Initiative and the British Council. Elaine sits on the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission's Arts and Human Rights Forum. She was previously a member of Void's curatorial team, Policing and Community Safety Partnership board, Arts Inform Steering Committee and was Chair of UV Arts.

Dr Áine O'Brien is a curator/researcher who has worked across the arts, education and social change in the US, Ireland and the UK. To date Áine's work spans documentary film, print, and curation. Áine was co-founder/co-director (2012–2020) of the London-based Counterpoints, foregrounding art, displacement and social change. As Director of Learning Lab Agency, she mentors and provides critical support for socially engaged artists and practitioners, and in partnership with Create is Creative Director for the Summer School on Collaborative Practice and Social Change. Recent publications include the co-edited Art, Migration and the Production of Radical Democratic Citizenship (Frontiers of the Political Series, Bloomsbury, 2024).

Symposium Partner Organisations

Metropolitan Arts Centre (MAC) is Northern Ireland's leading art centre. Housing two theatres, three galleries, dance studios, bar/café, and multi-purpose spaces, we've welcomed approximately 3 million visitors since opening in 2012. We exist to make Northern Ireland a better place by enabling people to create, enjoy, and participate in outstanding art. Our vision for social change is to operate in a society where all people are treated equitably.

Learning Lab Agency is an interdisciplinary socially engaged arts practice platform, exploring creative and collaborative interventions into local and global cultural politics. It enables democratic spaces for horizontal, mutual (un)learning and the production of cooperative knowledge through place-based projects. Providing critical support to socially engaged artists, cultural workers and cross-sector initiatives, learning labs are offered through a variety of formats including mentoring, curation, research, immersive incubators, and workshops.

Create is Ireland's national development agency for collaborative arts, enabling artists and communities to create exceptional art together. Our mission is to model, develop and advocate for the conditions which enable collaborative arts practice to flourish and for artists and communities to be supported in creating work of depth, meaning and purpose together. As a national resource organisation, we offer supports both for artists working in social and community contexts, and the communities with whom they collaborate.

National Sculpture Factory

Housed in a 19th century former tram garage and power station, supported by the Arts Council and Cork City Council, National Sculpture Factory is a Visual Arts resource organisation, supporting creation of small to large scale sculpture, with facilities for casting, welding, woodworking and ceramic kilns, in addition to space enabling experimentation and creation of Art, in a collegiate and supportive environment. In addition, NSF develops curatorial resources, with library and administrative workspaces for artists.

Symposium Funders

Cultural Bridge celebrates bilateral artistic partnerships between the UK and Germany through the collaboration between Arts Council England, the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, British Council, Creative Scotland, Fonds Soziokultur, Goethe-Institut London and Wales Arts International / Arts Council of Wales.

The **Bertha Foundation's** mission is to support activists, storytellers and lawyers who are working to bring about social and economic justice for all.

The **Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade's Reconciliation Fund** was established in 1982 to support civil society organisations in creating a better understanding between people and traditions on the island of Ireland, and between Ireland and Britain.

Symposium partners



METROPOLITAN
ARTS CENTRE

LEARNING LAB AGENCY.



create national development
agency for collaborative arts



Symposium funders

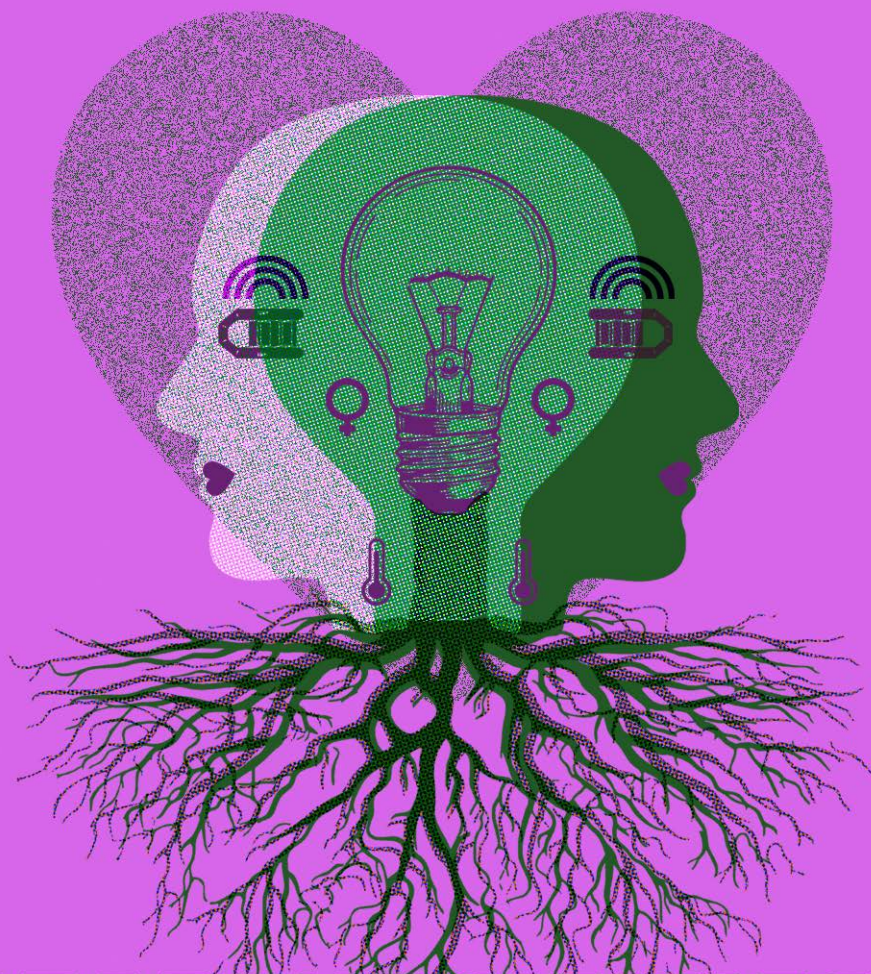


An Roinn Gnóthaí Eachtracha agus Trádála
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
RECONCILIATION FUND



Belfast
City Council

MAC Core funders



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