

LIVING

As a general rule of thumb you should mention Brexit as little as possible in the intro of an article you want people to read. It's overplayed, overused and people are fatigued from hearing the word.

Shaping an image of the Border

PROJECT Culture Night to display 'A Day in the Life of a Border Town'

THOMAS LYONS

Yet it's still of great interest in Cavan, because for years "the Border" was a huge part of our lives. It cast a shadow over everyday living. So when the "B" word is used, it evokes memories of a time we thought past.

In an art studio in Cavan Town, 15 pieces of art are set out to dry: Sculptures approaching the final stage of the creative process having transitioned from imagination, to wads of clay into a final tangible expression of themes the group have spent months working on.

They are the culmination of a collaboration between Marie Smith, a sculptor selected to provide visual arts workshops on the peace related themes, and 15 participants who volunteered to be part of this Peace IV initiative exploring what the Border means in a county where its significance escalates day by day.

Culture Night, September 20, 2019, will celebrate the reopening of Townhall Arts Space Cavan.

To mark it, the Arts Office of Cavan County Council engaged a number of artists to work with community groups and individuals in the Cavan Fermanagh border area to create something that breaks down borders, while at the same time recognising those delineations.

The objects on display in Ms Smith's studio are close to the finished article, but not quite. The sculptures are still in their infancy. They have yet to reach the adolescence of the kiln, which will bring them to maturity.

Even at this stage there's an intricacy to the sculptures. The smooth lines suggesting form are infused with detail. Hair, cloth, facial expressions are all evoked through the manipulation of the clay.

At the core of each objet d'art on the table in the studio is an idea. "We discussed what the ideal of the project was. It ranged from what life was like in Cavan during the Troubles, to what the Border meant to people on an individual basis. I showed them what my plan was, then they came back with their own ideas on what their figure would represent," Marie speaks of the process.

Procedure is as much a part of this art as the finished article: "Each of the figures have emotion or memory. Some are symbolic or contain symbolic elements."



Virginia sculptor Marie Smith with some of the pieces ready for firing.

Meaning

The artists have been working with the material for at least 26 hours in classes held over the last number of months. They have imprinted more than just form, but evoked meaning from the clay. Meaning is what the project is all about.

The themes are apparent, yet maintain enough subtlety to demand the observer apply some consideration to work out what the meaning is. All art is the manifestation of idea, evolving from a mental images into an experience a third party can perceive.

As a facilitator Marie has given the participants tools to create the sculptures. Those tools are as esoteric as knowledge, or as practical as the clay itself. She is a sculptor from Virginia whose sculptures are in private collections. Selected for the Royal Hibernian Academy Show in 2018, Marie will exhibit there again this year.

Her studio contains works being prepared for that show. They are wonderfully fluid, highly polished Jesmonite figures that make her such a collectable artist. Sensuous forms cast in bronze are other creations.

Marie returned to Cavan after living and working in Paris for a number of years. The sculptor has hosted workshops at the Bridge St Centre, Cavan, for individual and

groups, but this is a slightly different departure.

"The brief was to explore the legacy of peace in our border area and the wider positive implications for cultural, social and economic stability," she explains. This project runs in parallel with others that the Arts Office have facilitated for Culture Night.

The participants have varying degrees of experience. When the project was mooted, a call out for interested parties yielded the 15 sculptors: "Initially it was planned that I would work with a group of young Traveller women whom I met with and was greeted with great interest and enthusiasm for the project. The schedules just didn't line up this time but I am hoping that in the future, with the support of Cavan Arts Office, that we could work together and I very much look forward to that."

The people who took party in the show gained more than the modelling skills. Participant Christine O'Brien said it gave an insight into perceptions of living on the Border. "The art process we were facilitated through gave me similar insights. I was particularly struck by how we were encouraged to let others work on some of our pieces. This involved having to let go of ownership and control of how it was formed and glazed.



The fruits of the labour of 15 participants in this special project facilitated by Marie Smith.

"I found this particularly useful as it reflected the process of peace. That also involved letting go of old ideals and total control. Of trusting we were working towards the same end. The results were greater than I could have imagined," Christina said of the project.

Marie said the support of the Arts

Office and the Peace IV programme were vital: "On behalf of myself and the participants, we would like to thank the funders for this wonderful opportunity."

The fruits of 'A Day in the Life of a Border Town' will be on view to the public in Townhall Cavan on Culture Night, Friday, September 20.