

Culture

ART



PHOTOGRAPHS BY EÓIN O'CONNAILL FOR THE INTERNATIONAL HERALD TRIBUNE



ANTHONY HAUGHEY



DAVID MONAHAN



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Clockwise from top left: Opening night for an exhibition at the Basic Space gallery, operating in a temporarily unoccupied warehouse; one of Anthony Haughey's photographs from the "Settlement" series, portraying abandoned housing developments; Mr. Haughey in Dublin; another of Mr. Haughey's photographs; a portrait of Jade O'Callaghan the night before she left Ireland for Kuwait, by David Monahan, who has been photographing Irish economic emigrants.

Making art from the rubble

DUBLIN

In wake of Irish collapse, austerity inspires new works and galleries

BY DOREEN CARVAJAL

Nighttime is when David Monahan stalks dark streets in search of Ireland's "Generation Bailout," the nickname for the current wave of young Irish emigrants who are fleeing financial crisis for far-flung countries.

He snapped photograph No. 58 a few weeks ago in a shadowy fishing port in Loughshinny, County Dublin. His model was Graham Martin, 29, an art photographer bound for Brazil in search of a better prospect than his last job sorting Brussels sprouts.

His subjects "are heroes, adventurers, survivors," said Mr. Monahan, who has been recording bittersweet departures for 19 months in a series of photographs called "Leaving Dublin." "The project celebrates those who my city has no space for in these times."

"In these times" is Irish shorthand for 14.5 percent unemployment, rising taxes, slashed public spending and a humiliating €67.5 billion, or about \$87 billion, bailout by international lenders. But austerity has also evolved into a muse for Irish artists, who are both recording the crisis and finding opportunity in the wreckage left by a spree of reck-

less real-estate lending and toxic debts.

Some are striking cut-rate rental deals with bankrupt developers to create studios and galleries in vacant luxury apartment buildings and warehouses in cities from Limerick to Dublin. Others, like Mr. Monahan, 47 — whose own freelance work for national museums plunged in the crisis — are channeling sorrow and anger into their art, with a result that is often poignant and aching.

The inspiration born of the bailout is so rich that the filmmaker Donald Taylor Black, 60, director of Ireland's film school at the Institute of Art, Design and Technology, is creating an hourlong documentary about the genre of crash art. Paid for with an initial €100,000 from the Irish Film Board, its title, "Stuffing the Tiger," is a pointed reference to the country's distant "Celtic Tiger" boom times.

"Why am I doing it?" said Mr. Black, who has directed documentaries for 25 years, focusing on political and cultural issues. "This is the worst thing that has happened in Ireland for a long time. I feel angry that cutbacks are being made in education, in health services and throughout Irish life. And the ordinary citizen who wasn't responsible is being punished while it appears that builders, bankers and some politicians have gotten away with it."

He has filmed a collection of artists. They include a poet, a writer, a singer, painters, photographers and the animator of "Cutbacks," a series of stop motion, Web episodes featuring puppets

made with paper and scraps that deliver searing commentary about Ireland's plight.

For the past two years, David Quin, 60, a lecturer at the film school, has been making and posting online weekly 30-second episodes of "Cutbacks," which have proved popular with a predominantly male Irish audience. A short film featuring the puppets was shown at the 2011 Corona Cork Film Festival.

"It makes me furious," said Mr. Quin, who has mocked Ireland's prime minister, Enda Kenny, as a budget marionette in a suit and dangling strings. "We had absolutely no say in what's happening."

The financial crisis seems to push artists toward darkness. Mr. Monahan makes all his portraits of émigrés at night, for aesthetic reasons but also so that he can avoid street traffic. "The idea is to heighten the drama and make the work heroic," he said, "and to show how these young emigrants are full of strength and fortitude."

Anthony Haughey, 48, a Dublin art photographer, also roamed Ireland after twilight to capture the melancholy ruins of the nation's abandoned development projects.

His traveling photo exhibition — "Settlement" — opened in November in Dublin and is showing at the Helsinki Photography Biennale in Finland in March. The portraits feature stark landscapes of unsold and often unfinished cookie-cutter developments constructed before the real-estate market collapsed in 2008.

He worked at night, he said, to avoid disturbing security guards protecting the sites. After a while, he realized he was alone among the muddy patches and skeletons of brick houses with missing windows and roofs.

"I think I am tapping into a lot of anger and frustration," said Mr. Haughey, a lecturer at the Dublin Institute of Technology whose previous exhibitions explored Balkan conflicts in Kosovo and Srebrenica. "The real agenda for us is how do we move on from here? Ireland has been in a stasis for three years and

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On a winter night in Dublin, that kind of biting conversation echoed in a hangar-like warehouse transformed into a gallery called Basic Space.

The 930-square-meter, or 10,000-square-foot, building belongs to a once-high-flying developer, Harry Crosbie. He is one of more than 800 Irish developers who owe money to the National Asset Management Agency, known as NAMA, which took over more than €70 billion in real-estate debt from the country's overextended banks.

This year, Mr. Crosbie, who declined to be interviewed, agreed to let students

from the neighboring National College of Art and Design use the space as an art gallery. Basic Space has put on a handful of shows since it opened last September.

One exhibition on view there, "Underground," featured works of nine artists who created installations within a trench. One of them included a blunt reference to the real-estate boom and bust with the letters and symbols "Pa\$\$ing" posted on spikes in newly churned dirt.

Basic Space is operated on a shoestring by a handful of students. The art college absorbed insurance costs and the students covered the bill for modest utility expenses.

"Our goal is to be opportunistic with these times — grab a space and use it in a positive way," said Greg Howie, one of the founders of Basic Space. "This never could have happened during the Celtic Tiger boom."

"The developer was easygoing," he continued. "Their plan is to sit on the property and wait out the recession and knock it down. They're not really interested in the art or what we do — just the outcome of having a lot of people visit the building."

Art has a way of rising from the rubble, according to Simon Kelly, a real-estate developer and author of "Breakfast with Anglo," a book about his own experiences in the boom. He said he is allowing a theater group to use one of his Dublin buildings for free, even though he owes more than €100 million to

NAMA for soured property loans.

His motive: "Get people to the area so they are used to visiting," he said. "An empty building is really a drain on a street. It's like a derelict house. You can't let it happen."

NAMA has also been fielding a number of queries from artists who want to take advantage of its vast holdings of vacant buildings. "It is touching a nerve in the artistic community," said Ray Gordon, a spokesman for the state bank.

So far, though, the bank has concentrated on art as commerce to pay off the massive loans of some of its biggest debtors. It has seized a variety of works from failed developers, among them works by Irish artists such as Roderic O'Connor and Jack Butler Yeats, the brother of the poet, whose portrait summed up Ireland's plight: "A Man Doing Accounts."

NAMA has already reaped more than several million euros from art sales, according to Mr. Gordon, and has given a painting to the National Gallery in Ireland by John Lavery called "The Return From Market."

Last November, NAMA auctioned off an Andy Warhol painting owned by the failed developer Derek Quinlan, a former tax inspector. The work sold for \$782,500 at Christie's New York. Fittingly, it was a pink and blue painting of a dollar sign.

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