

Oireachtas Joint Committee on Regional Development, Rural Affairs, Arts and the Gaeltacht

Crawford Art Gallery

Submission of Chairman Designate Rose McHugh

Invitation

I am making this written submission to the Oireachtas Joint Committee in response to the invitation from the Chairperson, Peadar Tóibín TD.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Joint Committee for its invitation to appear before it in relation to my designated appointment as Chair of the Crawford Art Gallery (Crawford) and to outline the vision that the Board and I have for the Crawford.

I was appointed Chairman Designate in March 2017, subject to my appearance before the Joint Committee.

Biography

I am a Chartered Accountant, qualified in taxation, and have a law degree and an MBA from UCC.

I have 30 years' experience working at a senior level in the financial and commercial sector.

I have significant board experience and am now a full-time non-executive director.

I currently serve on boards in the public, private and voluntary sector, including Irish Life Group Ltd; Origin Enterprises plc; a hotel group; and a catering company. I am also on the board of The Irish Music Rights Organisation (IMRO), the national body administering performing rights in copyright music in Ireland on behalf of songwriters, composers and music publishers. I am on various Board sub-committees, including audit, finance, risk, remuneration, nominations, corporate governance and pensions. Also, I previously served two terms as chairman of Bord Iascaigh Mhara (BIM).

From my legal and commercial training and my experience on boards, I have an excellent understanding and appreciation of corporate governance. I believe that my experience will enable me to make a valuable contribution to the development of the Crawford's strategy and to good corporate governance in the organisation.

I have always had a keen interest in culture in general, and in particular the visual arts, and I have admired the role played by the Crawford in the development of the visual arts. I now look forward to playing my role in leading the Crawford on the next stage of its journey.

Brief history of the Crawford Art Gallery and its collection

The collection of the Crawford was originally formed in 1819, when a set of over 100 Graeco-Roman and Neo-Classical sculpture casts from the Vatican Museum in Rome was presented to the Cork Society of Arts. In 1825 the collection was transferred to its present building, which was built in 1724 as the Custom House for the city of Cork. The building was remodelled and extended in 1884 through the generosity of William Crawford. While an extension was added in 2000, the building has been developed in a piecemeal manner over 300 years and is long overdue a single cohesive strategic plan.

The sculpture casts are now on permanent exhibition in our dedicated sculpture room. The permanent collection comprises over 4,000 works and focuses mainly on Irish art from the eighteenth century to the present. It includes paintings in oil and watercolour, prints, stained glass, sculpture, mixed media and film, along with furniture and objects of cultural interest

There are important works by James Barry, who trained as an artist in Cork, and Daniel Maclise, one of the first students at the School of Art in 1819. We hold important works by, for example, George Russell, Mary Swanzy, Maine Jellett, Harry Clarke, Nathaniel Hone the Younger, May Guinness, Seán Keating, and Jack B. Yeats. Our collection of contemporary Irish art includes work by Tony O'Malley, Louis le Brocqy, Ellis O'Connell, Vivienne Roche, Maud Cotter, and Hughie O'Donoghue. There are also significant works by British artists, particularly from the late nineteenth century Newlyn School.

Donations to the Crawford have included the Cooper Penrose Collection of 18th century art, the Seamus Murphy collection of sculpture, work from the Great Southern Collection, and from the AIB Collection, all of which have enhanced the gallery's focus on Irish art. The nature and extent of our collection greatly enriches our exhibitions, and in 2014 we showcased three centuries of our collection in an exhibition and accompanying catalogue entitled "Three Centuries of Irish Art".

The Crawford was designated a National Cultural Institution in 2006 and is the only visual arts National Cultural Institution (NCI) located outside of Dublin. I am conscious that regional development is one of the core objectives of this committee, and I look forward to your support as this wonderful institution navigates the next stage of its journey.

The ownership of the building still rests with the Cork Education & Training Board, the successor to the VEC. Upon the Crawford becoming a NCI in 2006, the original plan was for the building to be transferred to the ownership of the OPW. However, the economic recession led to reduced budgets and resources for cultural institutions and over ten years later that transfer still has not happened. As a result, the Crawford found itself having to fund elements of repair and renewal of its old building from a very modest capital budget.

The ownership of this wonderful collection (pre-2006) also still rests with the Cork Education & Training Board and that needs regularising as soon as possible, not least because of the expensive insurance arrangements. One of my most immediate priorities is to regularise the position in relation to both the building and the collection.

Corporate Governance

Minister Heather Humphreys appointed eight new members to the Board in March 2017, including me. The current Director has just retired after 30 years working with the gallery, and we plan to appoint a new Director later this year. So, the Crawford is going through a significant period of change.

A draft strategic plan was prepared in 2011. When it was almost finalised, government policy to merge the institutions of National Gallery of Ireland (NGI), Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA), and the Crawford was announced. As a result, the individual strategic plan for the Crawford did not progress.

One of the Board's immediate priorities is to develop a new strategic plan in conjunction with senior staff and our new Director. I envision that the plan will build on our success in creating funding partnerships and strategic partnerships in order to continue to create exciting exhibitions both within the gallery space and at other locations, so that the Crawford can build on its reputation for putting culture in general, and the visual arts in particular, at the centre of civic life in Cork, in Munster, and further afield.

Operations

The Crawford has an extremely capable and dedicated team of people, and it is very evident that they all share a passion for the Crawford and its collection. The gallery excels at multi-disciplinary exhibitions that include paintings, film, objects, digital imagery, and text. Its innovative exhibitions and associated educational programmes provide a sense of history, place, context, and culture at a local, national, and indeed international level.

The Crawford has a dynamic temporary exhibitions programme that gives exposure to new and established artistic talent, as well as originating exhibitions of historical interest. It runs several exhibitions concurrently throughout the building, with circa 180,000 visitors every year. It has organised many highly successful shows such as

- *Seán Keating: Contemporary Contexts* and *Dorothy Cross: Jellyfish Lake* in 2012;
- *Analysing Cubism* and *Robert Ballagh: Seven* in 2013;
- *Three Centuries of Irish Art* and *Sunshine and Shadow: Aspects of British Impressionism 1920-1950* in 2014;
- *Head to Head: Vivienne Roche* and *Or: Kathy Prendergast* in 2015, and
- *Perceptions 2016: The Art of Citizenship* and *Conflicting Visions in a Turbulent Age 1900-1916* in 2016.

The gallery also pursues the potential for audience development by touring work off-site whenever possible.

- In 2013, the gallery worked with the OPW on a multi-media exhibition of work by 16 of Ireland's modern artists entitled *Prelude Speaker: Contemporary Castletown* at Castletown House. Demonstrating the extent of our strategic partnerships, the exhibition was made possible through collaboration with the OPW, the staff at Castletown House and the Crawford. The artworks were drawn from the artists themselves, and from private and public collections including the OPW, IMMA, Kildare County Council, the National Sculpture Factory and the Crawford.
- In October 2016, and for the first time in the gallery's 200-year history, a selection of paintings from the Crawford toured to the State Apartments and Coach House Galleries at Dublin Castle.

This highly successful exhibition highlighted the importance of the Crawford as an NCI for the visual arts, and of Dublin Castle as a place of historical, cultural, and political significance.

Education and Outreach Initiatives

We see great potential for audience development in further expanding our education and outreach initiatives. At the moment, we have programmes including a Saturday drawing classes for children, painting classes for children aged 8-12, a teen art programme for 14 – 17 year olds, a writing club, and a summer animation group. Most of our exhibitions have associated educational programmes, some with outreach initiatives. Examples include participating in the “Lifelong Learning Festival”, workshops have commenced with groups such as ASPECT (Autism Spectrum Support), Lonradh and a programme for women from Direct Provision Centres. The education team tailors activities to match the specific needs of various groups. These initiatives bring a rich cultural experience to all participants, which is in line with Culture 2025 Framework Policy (Culture 2025).

The Future

Along with the Board, I intend to embrace the fundamental premise from Culture 2025 that culture adds value to our lives and to our communities and that everyone has the right to participate in the cultural life of the nation. The mission of the Crawford includes a commitment to maximise access by the public to its collection, through long-term and shorter-term exhibitions drawn from the collection, and through short-term loans to other institutions for exhibitions. The permanent collection will assist in the promotion of Ireland’s visual arts internationally, through the website and through touring exhibitions to overseas museums and galleries. I would like to see the gallery open on Sundays as I think it could significantly increase our visitor numbers. I have asked management to bring a proposal to the Board evaluating the cost of this initiative.

Creative 2025 encourages the support of creativity in all its forms to ensure that future generations can build on and add to the contribution of past and present generations. Artists are central to what we do at the Crawford. We aim to commission more work from living artists, and I have asked management to consider creating a competitive commissioning process for artists to commemorate our 200-year anniversary in 2019.

Culture 2025 seeks to develop a more collaborative approach across all sectors. We have a special relationship with the NGI and IMMA, which is of mutual benefit in terms of sharing advice, touring exhibitions, enhancing audience development across the island, augmenting our education and outreach programme, and importantly, generating further income through sales of catalogues and books.

Culture 2025 also requires cultural institutions to respond to the digital age. We have digitized the entire collection, which is available online and continues to provide extensive resources for schools throughout Ireland. By allowing teachers and students to access high quality material, it broadens the reach both nationally and internationally. This year the gallery has commenced a more strategic approach to online engagement, increasing interaction with audiences on major social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

Commensurate with the Culture 2025 framework and the close linkage between public enjoyment of cultural activities and education policy, I would like to ensure that our exhibitions continue to be accompanied by thought-provoking and engaging educational and outreach activities involving public talks, tours, published catalogues, the use of digital media on our website and within the exhibitions,

and local/national/international festival presence. We aim to further collaborate with local educational facilities: junior schools, senior schools, UCC, and the Crawford College of Art, in order to broaden our educational and outreach programme.

Our audiences are very important to us. We recognise that we have many audiences, from the many communities visiting our exhibitions. We are innovative in our approach to exhibition design, and to our educational and outreach programmes, so that our audiences experience excitement, motivation, pleasure, and learning. A recent example comes to mind with our “Made in Cork” exhibition, during which lace making classes were held for the general public within the gallery space.

We aim to continually learn from international best practice in terms of innovative curatorial processes, audience development, strategic alliances and in training and development our in-house team.

Whilst we have a demonstrably good record in terms of gender balanced exhibitions, I plan to introduce a formal gender and diversity exhibition policy.

Income

As a National Cultural Institution, the Crawford receives its funding from central government. In 2016, it received a grant of approximately €1,375,000 and had almost 180,000 visitors. I was surprised by how much good work it does on quite a modest budget. The gallery does not charge an admission fee, and it typically generates additional income of around €100,000 income from other sources. Going forward, we plan to increase this additional independent income. Gallery management have undertaken a promotion of gallery hire for various corporate events in addition to offsite days for teams and board meetings, and this has been very successful.

I have set up a new Building & Development subcommittee, which will have responsibility for (1) the refurbishment and extension of the existing building and (2) generation of third party income from various sources, including corporate sponsorship for exhibitions and events. This subcommittee includes members from the existing board and external members. I propose to chair this committee and I plan to utilise my commercial skills to help the subcommittee to achieve its objectives.

Master Development Plan

The proposed strategic plan will be consistent with our Master Development Plan, which will be driven by the newly created Building & Development subcommittee. Once the building has been transferred to the OPW, I plan to prioritize the development of the Capital Project Plan, which will be implemented on a phased basis over a period of 5/6 years. It is hoped to keep part of the gallery open during that refurbishment program.

As preliminary work on this, the OPW commissioned three architectural firms to carry out a strategic appraisal of the Crawford in 2016. Their consensus view was that the Crawford is an important historic building, with fine galleries and an excellent location in the city centre, but constrained by various factors. They noted that the gallery had developed in a piecemeal way, with significant investment in 1724, 1884 and 2000, interspersed with decades of minor alterations and improvements.

All agreed that it is possible to extend, upgrade and optimise the existing historic buildings to create a gallery that will meet the standard for a National Cultural Institution. This would augment our exhibition space, our storage facilities, our education facilities, our bookshop and general circulation space throughout the building.

The gallery's development over 300 years was not guided by a single strategy or plan, and such a plan is now urgently needed so that, with appropriate development, the Crawford can deliver the new and enhanced cultural services outlined in the government's 2016 "Creative Ireland" initiative.

Immediate Priorities

My immediate priorities, working with the board and management are:

- Make interim arrangements for the management of the gallery
- Recruit a new Director
- Develop a Strategic Plan for the next five years
- Have ownership of the building transferred to the OPW
- Have ownership of the art collection transferred to the Crawford
- Commence the refurbishment program
- Develop third party income

I would like to thank the Minister, who recently appointed a great board with an excellent range of skills. Over the next five years, we look forward to working with management to deliver a gallery of which we can all be proud and which will be fit for purpose as it faces into the next 300 years.

Finally, I would like to thank the Committee for its invitation to present this submission and to appear before you.