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Contemporary vision

21 JULY 2020

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ON SHOW From left: 'Dooneery, Noon - Winter Solstice, 1997', by Rachel Brown; 'Evening Winter (Portrait)', by Mick O'Dea; and 'Threshold' by Julie Bradley

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The Ballinglen Museum of Contemporary Art opens its doors in Ballycastle

Ciara Moynihan

The latest addition to Ballycastle's suite of riches is truly a sumptuous feast for the eyes. Nestled between Downpatrick Head and the Céide Fields, Ballycastle has been attracting visual artists for decades. These artists have been drawn not only by the inspirational, history-soaked, wild and rugged landscape in which this north Mayo jewel of a village is set, but also by the thriving Ballinglen Arts Foundation at its heart. Now, the foundation has added another gemstone. The Ballinglen Museum of Contemporary Art, officially opened yesterday (Monday) by Michael Ring TD, is beautiful inside and out. A state-of-the-art two-storey gallery, it showcases artwork from the Ballinglen Permanent Collection – a growing contemporary-art collection that is already one of the largest in the country.

Imaginative solution

Ballinglen Arts Foundation was established by American art-dealing couple Margo Dolan and Peter Maxwell in 1992. While holidaying in Ballycastle, they noticed the potentially devastating impact of rural decline, and they were inspired to do something about it. Drawing on their own expertise, they set about developing a project that would attract international artists to visit and work in the area, thereby boosting the economy of the spectacularly scenic but remote coastal town.

And it worked. In the years that followed, hundreds of painters, printmakers and sculptors have enjoyed creative residential art fellowships at Ballinglen, bringing their families and friends to stay and live in the village.

The facility incorporates artists' studios, a printmaking studio and living accommodation. Visiting artists become part of the community during their visit, frequenting local shops, cafés, schools and churches. Many return time and time again to the area, forging strong connections along the Céide Coast.

Diverse responses

The sought-after Ballinglen Fellowships are highly competitive, and

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when leaving, each selected artist donates a piece of work to the foundation. Collectively, these works have come to form an impressive permanent art collection that currently stands at roughly 800 diverse paintings, drawings, original prints and three-dimensional works. The method by which the collection has been amassed is truly unique, yielding fascinating insight into each artist's experience of Ballinglen and north Mayo and their individual responses to the time they spent there.

A selection of these works form the new Ballinglen Museum of Art's inaugural exhibition, entitled '28 Years Rambling through the Landscape'. This show features work by artists Eric Aho, Mary Armstrong, Alex Boyd, Julie Bradley, Rachel Brown, Linda Carey, Roger Chavez, Nuala Clarke, Gail Shaw Clemons, Gwen Davidson, Randall L Exon, Charles Field, Ruth Fine, Bill Freeland, David Gibson, Dan L Gualdoni, Patrick Harris, Christobel Kelly, Edward Kennedy, David Lilburn, Ed Miliano, Mick O'Dea, Barbara Rae, Jeffrey Reed, Ryan Reynolds, Charles Ritchie, Thomas Roese, Ronald Rumford, Stuart Shils, John Smalley, Ken Smith, Christie Taylor and Keith Wilson. The exhibitions will change every few months during the year, and will also include prestigious shows from outside the Ballinglen Collection. One to watch out for is an upcoming major solo exhibition of work by renowned artist and printmaker Norman Ackroyd.

The Ballinglen Museum of Contemporary Art is located just beside the Ballinglen Arts Foundation on Ballycastle's main street. It is open Monday to Saturday, from 10am to 5pm, and Sunday, from 1pm to 5pm.

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