Seirbhís Phríosúin na hÉireann
Irish Prison Service

Alternative Ways of Seeing An exhibition of work by people in custody 2024

19th March 2024

'Alternative Ways of Seeing' is a national exhibition of artwork produced in prisons and curated by artist Eddie Cahill, a former prisoner himself, and an inspirational figure in the world of prison arts.

Cahill together with Tom Shortt, Arts Officer for the Irish Prison Service, travelled the length and breadth of the country, selecting a body of work which spans all of the prisons in Ireland and displays a wealth of skills taught within the prison education system. Works include large, glazed ceramic vases with intricate gold work that display narratives from the prisons, large canvases of landscapes dreamed of from the outside, intricate works in fabric, leather, and beaten copper. Some highlights of the exhibition are artworks made from found accessible materials from within the prison such as soap, bread and even stones collected from the prison yard. These found materials have been carved and manipulated to create new meanings reflecting the resourcefulness and creativity of prisoners.

Arts Officer for the Irish Prison Service, Tom Shortt said that "***it was appropriate to have Eddie Cahill involved in the process of shaping the exhibition as he provided insights from the prisoners' perspective, and he is a role model for another generation of prisoners who have started painting and hope to emulate his achievements as an artist."*** Cahill, who currently has a solo exhibition of his work at Limerick City Gallery titled *'Searching in the Dark'*, said of his own experience of art education in the prison service that ***"many discover that art puts them in touch with their creative potential and it helps them to break the cycle of crime and prison."***

The exhibition is the culmination of creative artistic work by people in custody, in classrooms and cells in the 14 prisons and in 3 post-release centres in Ireland. Alternative Ways of Seeing is the second national exhibition of work by people in custody held in collaboration with Rua Red and the Irish Prison Service, supported by South Dublin County Council and The Arts Council.

Rua Red's Director Maolíosa Boyle said in her opening remarks ***"Rua Red is delighted to be collaborating again with the Irish Prison Service on Alternative Ways of Seeing, curated by Eddie Cahill. This exhibition is integral to Rua Red's artistic programme which reflects on the themes of Belonging and Displacement. The exhibition celebrates the skilled and diverse array of work created by people in custody nationwide. Eddies intuitive curatorial insight has skillfully brought together many individual pieces to create one powerful and coherent body of work."***

Also speaking at the exhibition, the Director General of the Irish Prison Service, Caron McCaffrey said, "***I am immensely proud to present the 'Alternative Ways of Seeing' exhibition, a testament to the transformative power of creative expression within our prison community. Through this showcase, we not only celebrate artistic talent but also emphasise the vital role of education and creativity in fostering rehabilitation and personal growth among those in our care."***

The exhibited artworks embody the transformative power of creative education programs within Irish Prisons. Through a multidisciplinary approach, the Prison Education Service aims to equip individuals with essential skills, foster personal development, and instill a passion for lifelong learning. The Prison Education Service is provided in partnership with the Education and Training Boards, with a joint vision of *"A prison education service based on self-respect and respect for others, within a safe, supportive learning environment"*. The prison arts programme has immense benefits, allowing students to reflect, explore and be creative.

The event was also attended by the Mayor of South Dublin County Council, Alan Edge.

This national exhibition of artwork produced in prisons, was opened on Tuesday, 19th March 2024 by Head of Audience Development & Stakeholder Engagement, from the National Gallery of Ireland, Andrew Hetherington who said ***"At the National Gallery of Ireland we believe in the benefits that participation in the arts has for people and for society. I would like to congratulate everyone involved in presenting their work in the 'Alternative Ways of Seeing' exhibition at Rua Red and commend the Irish Prison Service for championing their creative artistic work."***

The exhibition runs until 27th April 2024 at Rua Red, South Dublin Arts Centre, Tallaght.

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