

Artistic Policy

Mermaid is dedicated to powering creativity in Co. Wicklow.

Mermaid's approach to programming is to present work that is contemporary and/or relevant to audiences and communities in Wicklow. When we say contemporary, we simply mean art that is made by artists living today, rather than implying a particular style.

We show work that helps us understand and enjoy the world as it is today. Our programme is, by necessity and design, a broad church, encompassing the work of brilliant artists whose work ranges the spectrum from upholding tradition all the way to through to breaking entirely with it.

Across our visual art and live performance programmes, and including the priorities highlighted below, we take a particular interest in work that is:

Playful

that blurs lines and boundaries between disciplines, that defies categorisation, doesn't conform easily and is irreverent about form. We love the sense of playfulness and fun that work like this can bring.

Intimate

that pays attention to and is deeply invested in the connection between artist and audience, that thinks about bodies in space together and the extraordinary possibility that offers.

Risky

that takes risks and experiments with ways in which contemporary art is presented through pursuing creative expression, exposing distinct voices, exploring new ideas or piloting developmental concepts.

Our strategic priorities for the organisation overall and the programme, are: Connect Communities. Champion Artists. Be a Pipeline. Work Sustainably.

We programme work at Mermaid **for our audiences**, to **make sure that work has a strong relationship with our local community**. Our core programme involves **activity that we influence and develop, that directly delivers our artistic policy**.

How you can see our policy and priorities in our work:

- We present a diverse and balanced programme including some of the newest and most exciting performance and visual artworks being made today, as well as the foremost artists working in traditional music and storytelling, both in Ireland and internationally
- We present work that represents all aspects of contemporary art practice, from the challenging to the entertaining and everything in between.

- We engage Mermaid audiences with the work of contemporary artists by creating accessible entry points into exhibitions and artworks.
- We explore new and innovative ways to facilitate access and to encourage audience development and participation.
- We develop community-led activities (e.g. Seascribes; FridayFest).
- We examine and experiment with ways in which contemporary art is presented.
- We act as a pipeline by working with artists and companies during the development of work. This enables us to find ways of engaging audiences alongside and during the creative process, to explore new and innovative ways to facilitate access and to encourage audience development and participation. This pipeline frequently helps to carry artists on to the next step in their career and/or helps an artist find other presenting opportunities and a wider audience for the work.
- We provide an artist-centred approach and curatorial support for emerging and established artists working towards exhibitions and projects in Mermaid.
- We provide opportunities for artists with a Wicklow connection and support their professional development through provision of development space, sometimes financial support, Gap Day, WIP sharing, networking and advocacy.
- We work sustainably by which we mean giving serious consideration to the working environment and conditions of artists and arts workers. Mermaid is guided by the Arts Council's Paying The Artist policy and we ensure artists don't work in or for Mermaid without equitable pay.
- We offer dedicated supports for performance-based artists (e.g. Gap Day).
- We work in partnership with other national and international institutions.

Artistic Policy in Practice

Presenting your work at Mermaid

Mermaid develops and supports artistic practice and collaborates with individuals, communities and organisations to deliver an inclusive, connected and accessible public programme.

We present performances in our auditorium, and at locations offsite (such as on the seafront or in schools and libraries all over Co. Wicklow). We present exhibitions and live art events in our gallery and at locations offsite.

Often we bring work to Mermaid that challenges perceptions of what live performance, visual art, or film might usually look like, that offers audiences a different kind of experience to more traditional forms.

Ultimately, we present work we are passionate about, so there are exceptions to everything.

We select artists and companies to work with based on the content and style of their work as well as their practice. We identify people to work with by attending festivals and showcases, meeting artists, listening to recommendations and seeing as many performances, concerts, readings and exhibitions as our small team can manage!

You can find out more about seeking support and/or submitting your work [here](#).

Live Performance

Our live performance programme is usually planned around 18-36 months ahead. We present comedy, dance, music, opera, theatre, literary readings and conversations, oral storytelling and arthouse cinema. If you are interested in being part of our programme, please email details to director@mermaidartscentre.ie.

Occasionally, we make our auditorium available for commercial hire. Enquiries for rates on venue hire should go to: venuehire@mermaidartscentre.ie.

If a piece of work pitched for consideration to Mermaid doesn't fall into our areas of interest, we will try to recommend an alternative presenting option. The reality is that we simply cannot facilitate every event, but we'd like to be clear that in declining a proposal we don't intend to undermine its value – rather it either doesn't meet our artistic or commercial priorities, or previous programming commitments are already in place preventing availability.

Gallery Curatorial Policy

Mermaid Arts Centre offers a curated visual art programme, which includes five to six exhibitions annually, in addition to off-site events, workshops, talks, tours and screenings.

Our Curatorial Policy centres collaboration, innovation, integrity and inclusion, foregrounding the commissioning and production of new work in addition to providing opportunities for local and marginalised artists.

Mermaid's exhibitions and associated events are scheduled up to 24 months in advance, on the invitation of the Curator who works closely with artists to develop and realise the production of the Visual Art programme.

While we do not accept unsolicited submissions for exhibitions, we welcome artists and curators to inform us of their artistic practice and upcoming events and exhibitions by email to Anne Mullee, Gallery Programme Curator anne@mermaidartscentre.ie.

Commissions originate through direct approaches to artists. Often this occurs at a pivotal point in their career, where Mermaid's support at a critical step leads towards further career development and opportunities.

This curated approach aligns with the model in many arts centres in receipt of funding through local authority support and the Arts Council. This not-for-profit model of funding supports professional artists through a combination of artist fees, production costs, use of the gallery space, marketing and communications support and curatorial support.

Open Call – approximately every 2 years we put out an open call for submissions to our gallery. You can subscribe to our mailing list or stay tuned to our social media channels for up-to-date information on open calls.

The Gallery at Mermaid cannot be hired for exhibitions. However, the space may occasionally be rented for one-off events as part of our fundraising initiatives.

The duration and turnover of exhibitions is largely dictated by our limited time and resources, having only a part-time Curator on the team at present. Our ambition to extend beyond our current capacity as a small organisation includes the fostering of partnerships with comparable organisations, in the form of in-kind support and the building of networks, including ongoing relationships with the South East Venue Network (SEVN), Killruddery Arts and Kunstverein Aughrim. We aim to expand these relationships further through future projects.

MermaidSPACE

Mermaid SPACE is the strand of our work where we offer financial and in-kind supports to artists of all disciplines. It encompasses bursaries, commissions, residencies, provision of space for R&D & creation, and professional development supports such as workshops, mentorship, production advice, and advocacy.

We prioritise putting time and resources into providing development support for artists making new work. We offer a safe channel for both the artists and the work at a phase in the process that can be delicate and vulnerable. It's important to us to create an environment that can best support that phase before the work goes out into the wider world.

The overall value of Mermaid's investment in cash terms varies annually and is subject to funding levels from our own core funders. There is significant resource in-kind committed too, in terms of both space and staff time. We regularly make our multipurpose room and auditorium available for use by artists of all disciplines, at strategic times in the year.

We welcome approaches from artists at all stages of their career. Meeting with you can help us to understand your needs and assess how we might be able to support, which is often bespoke to the individual artist or project.

If you would like more information on how we can help, please see <https://www.mermaidartscentre.ie/whats-on/artist-support> or email director@mermaidartscentre.ie at the earliest stage of developing your work.

Our Mermaid SPACE programme will support the following artists to develop new work in 2025-2026 across a range of different artforms:

- Development investment in workshops for artist Philp St John to develop *The Occupant*
- Development investment in His Left, Her Right by Speckintime with Wicklow based writer Philip St John, which will go to Fringe Festival 2026
- Co-production investment in Brokentalkers Heros of Yesterday, which will premiere at Mermaid before going to the Dublin Theatre Festival 2026
- Development investment in Brokentalkers new work De Facto
- Development investment in Rebel Resisters Radio workshop for young girls in Wicklow Town Library
- Development investment in FridayFest, facilitated by artist Elida Maiques
- Development investment in Sarah Mc Kenna Dunne's new work *Whistling in the Wind* (working title)

- Development investment in Wicklow artist Sian Quill's new work *Soap Sisters*
- Development investment in Wicklow artist Marty Breen's *BITCH*, which went to Edinburg Fringe to receive five star reviews
- Development investment in Dan Colley's *The Lottery*
- Development investment in Wicklow writer Sally Ó Dúnlaing's new work *Warped*
- Development investment in Oisin Kearney's new work *Good With Faces*
- Development investment in theatre director Cathal Cleary's new musical based on the music of Sinéad O'Connor
- Investment in an YARN oral storytelling residency with the Centre Culturel Irlandais in Paris
- Contribution to a bursary fund for an artist (from any discipline) from the South East, as part of our partnership with the South East Venue Network.
- Development investment into a new arts participation project The Roundwood Series in 2025 and this will be developed further into 2026 with Beyond Bray to include the Roundwood Community Centre, The Assembly Hall in Wicklow and Arklow
- Development investment into a new body of sound artwork from Wicklow artist Maia Nunes
- Development investment in a new theatre project by Dan Colley, with whom we co-produced the acclaimed *Lost Lear* in 2022/23. *Lost Lear* won the coveted Fringe First award at the Edinburgh Fringe 2025
- Development investment into a new arts participation project The Roundwood Series in 2025 and this will be developed further into 2026 with Beyond Bray to include the Roundwood Community Centre, The Assembly Hall in Wicklow and Arklow
- Development investment into new visual artwork and commissioning of new work
- Investment in Branar *Meitheal* Producer programme

In addition to the financial investments we make, we also offer in-kind supports including physical resources e.g. space and tech support (which amounts to a value of approx. €110K annually), and human resources e.g. mentorship, advocacy, producing support, dramaturgical support (which amounts to a value of approx. €40K annually). This represents approximately 25% of our core staff costs.

The artists who will benefit from these supports in 2025/2026 include those listed above as well as: theatre artists Julie Kelleher, Mr. Sands Youth Theatre, Jess Rowell, dance artists Luke Murphy and Nóra Ní Anluain Fay; musicians Eamon Sweeney and Izumi and sculptor Helen O'Connell as well as the hosting and financial administration of Wicklow Artists Salon.

To hear about further artist opportunities at Mermaid, please sign up to [our mailing list](#).

YARN Storytelling Festival @ Mermaid Arts Centre

YARN Storytelling festival is a non-profit making community festival organised and run by Mermaid Arts Centre with the aim of engaging audiences across the County using the traditional artform of oral storytelling. Now entering its 16th year, the festival runs for two weeks each November with events taking place in schools, libraries, community groups, hotels, pubs etc alongside on the stage in Mermaid Arts Centre.

For further information or if you are interested in being part of our programme, contact YARN Storytelling Creative Producer Danielle Lynch at danielle@mermaidartscentre.ie.

TAKE PART: Participation and Creative Learning

Mermaid's Take Part programme is underpinned by our belief that creative learning can happen at any age, for anybody, from any background and our strategic goal to deepen our roots in the community.

Over the past two years, we have developed our Take Part Programme sustainably and in line with our strategic priorities. Now managed by a dedicated Participation Producer, this programme is becoming better integrated into our work and includes socially engaged/community-led artists residencies, education initiatives, and an eclectic workshop series. We work with artists and communities to identify projects and initiatives that align with the needs and ambitions of these stakeholders. We offer in-kind and financial supports for artists, providing space for artists and communities to come together, connecting artists with community groups, while offering advice and R&D supports for artists creating work in community contexts to innovate within their practice. We know from experience that building relationships with communities takes significant time and resources, and we are committed to forging relationships with artists who are aligned with our strategic ambitions to connect with communities and increase the relevance of Mermaid's work in a sustainable and meaningful way.

Our Take Part programme is developed by invitation and by open call (every two years approximately, we will issue an Open Call for workshops). For further information or if you are interested in taking part, contact our Participation Producer Danielle Lynch at danielle@mermaidartscentre.ie.

Community & Local Arts

Mermaid is home to a huge variety of talented and committed local arts groups and individuals. The work they make and present is of great value and importance to the centre's programme and relationship with local communities. We annually present up to 70 performances, which represents approximately 20% of available time in the auditorium, from a range of local groups: secondary schools, amateur drama groups, musical societies, stage schools and dance academies, and organisations that work with adults (and children) with intellectual disabilities (e.g. Sunbeam House, Bray Lakers).

If you are a group who hasn't yet worked with us, but would like to, you can email us at venuehire@mermaidartscentre.ie.