

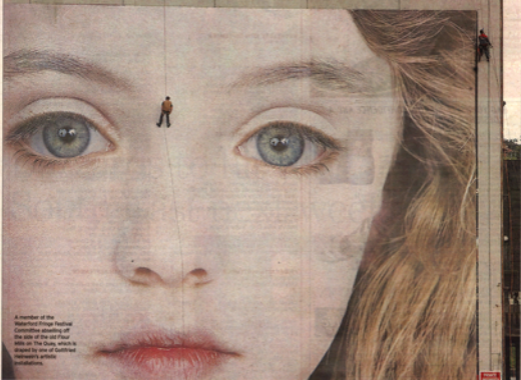
Waterford News & Star

the guide

September 12, 2008

Entertainment, TV, fashion and beauty

Understanding Helnwein



A member of the Waterford Fringe Festival Committee standing off the side of the old Four Mills on The Quay, which is draped by one of Gottfried Helnwein's artistic installations.

News & Star the guide

Understanding Helnwein

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The main attraction for this year's Waterford Fringe Festival, which runs from September 14-30, Gottfried is a huge coup for the event organisers. An internationally renowned artist, he has been exhibiting his artworks since 1966 and has collaborated with many well-known artists, writers, actors and musicians, including Marlene Dietrich, William Burroughs, James Brown, German band Rammstein, Andy Warhol, Mick Jagger, David Bowie and Sean Penn, as well as hosting Marilyn Manson's Wedding at his castle in 2006. Deeply private about his celebrity friends, Gottfried does admit they love spending time with him at his Kilsheelan home in Gurteen Castle. "The house is always full with friends", he said. "I always want to introduce people to Ireland and especially Waterford. It's a unique place in the world and when they come they are always deeply impressed with it."

Gottfried made Waterford his home 12 years ago and spends half the year here and the other half in Los Angeles. "Over 12 years ago, I took my family on holidays all over Ireland and fell completely in love with it. I wanted to live in a castle, so told my wife Renate to find a great one and what we got here in Waterford is exactly what I wanted." The statuesque Gurteen Castle has played host to many grand events, most notably Marilyn Manson's wedding to Wonderbra model Dita von Teese, which Gottfried simply says was "strange and fun".

FRIENDLY PEOPLE

Having visited the city during the week, Gottfried said he was again reminded of why he loves Waterford. "The people I met were all very positive about the installations and talked to me about them. People are extremely friendly and courteous and the support is unbelievable, even from those who might not like it as much." The current installations on display continue a theme that Gottfried has been working on since 1970.

"I started to paint out of concern for victims and mainly children exposed to violence. It's something I've always been focused on. The main theme is a metaphor for innocence and the child in all of us."

Gottfried insists that he doesn't intend to be controversial, saying his work is a reaction to the world around us. "There is so much violence inflicted on children. We are living in a brutal, evil world and are constantly getting destructive information from the likes of video games and movies. Children have a very tough time now, living in a world of terror

and violence." By presenting these harsh Images, Gottfried says he is making social commentary.

"I want to open people's eyes and to make them aware of what's going on in the world around us. It forces people to think and talk about it." Gottfried makes the point, is it okay for us to watch movies with kids killing people, like perhaps 'Blood Diamond,' starring Leonardo di Caprio and dealing with Sierra Leone. The movie, which had huge box office success, saw young children being given guns and forced to kill people.

So is it okay to watch these scenes in a movie for entertainment but "freak out" when they are forced to look at pictures depicting real life situations?

AN INNOCENT CITY

Spending half his year in Los Angeles, Gottfried says in comparison Waterford is a breath of fresh air and "so innocent." "Waterford is still very innocent in terms of what's going on out there in the world. You can still go into a small pub here and see people dancing and playing music. It doesn't exist anywhere else in the world; it's just so fantastic. But things are changing, drugs are coming in and that perfect innocence will be lost in time." With regard to the Fringe Festival, Gottfried had an exhibition last year but was interested in presenting something bigger.

I wanted to get out of the museums and galleries and wanted to show my work on a bigger scale." A major talking point, his art is loved by some and is being criticised by others. "Good art is always a love it or hate it kind of thing. Great works of art have caused upset down through the ages. Look at the Sistine Chapel, there was outrage when that was revealed because Jesus and the saints were depicted naked. Art is supposed to have an emotional impact and I can understand why my work upsets people and yet they are still polite about it. Other cities are much more aggressive. I welcome criticism and emotions. Art should be a challenge. People always forget we are constantly exposed to violence and they accept it as long as it's entertainment. How I depicted it is very moderate compared to what's shown in the media. I recently saw a clip on You Tube of a young girl being stoned in an Asian country and people recording her intense pain on their mobile phones."

Gottfried says that the history of art is embedded in violent images. "There is a tradition of violence in Chris-tian art. I grew up a Roman Catholic and the first pictures I saw depicted pain. Austria had a long Baroque period, which always dealt with death." Having just worked on a very successful exhibition in the State Museum in Prague called "Modern Sleep", Gottfried is currently working on another for New York and San Francisco. If that wasn't enough, he is also designing a set and costumes for a new opera, which is underway in Israel called "The Child Dreams."

"It's a fantastic new opera and to be honest it's like it was written for my art", he says. Along with his extensive theatre works and art, Gottfried is also a noted photog-rapher, and has presented many exhibi-tions throughout the world, including "Once Upon a Time Walt Disney: The Sources of Inspiration for Disney". "Opening my first Donald Duck

comic book felt like seeing the daylight again for someone who had been trapped underground by a mine-disaster for many days. I squinted cautiously because my eyes hadn't gotten used to the dazzlingly bright sun of Duckburg yet, and I greedily sucked the fresh breeze into my dusty lungs that came drifting over from Uncle Scrooge's money bin. I was back home again, in a decent world where one could get flattened by steamrollers and perforated by bullets without serious harm. A world in which people still looked proper, with yellow beaks or black knobs instead of noses. And it was here that I met the man who would forever change my life - Donald Duck."

With such fascinating commentaries on real life situations and depictions of the harsh reality of the world around us, Gottfried Hel-nwein has certainly succeeded in achieving his Most important mantra in Water-ford.
"My Art is not an answer, - it is a question."