

The Munster Express

Anti War Art by World-Renowned Austrian Artist

By Kieran Walsh

Thursday, September 4th, 2008

Internationally-renowned artist, Gottfried Helnwein, launched the Waterford Fringe Festival at his castle at Kilsheelan, Co Waterford on 28th August, 2008.

Waterford Fringe Festival runs from 14 - 28 September in locations around Waterford city, and will feature large scale installations (some as large as 120ft x 80ft) of Helnwein's work on buildings in the city.

We caught a first glimpse of the display of wall art, at the launch in Gortroe Castle, Kilsheelan, near Carrick on Suir and were most impressed.

This will be controversial as the theme is children and war and how they are becoming victims of war.

Gottfried took time out to talk specially to the Munster Express on the theme of the installations called "Lost Child".

Children are victims of war says Gottfried, sometimes they are brought into the conflict and given weapons. Only last week a teenage girl surrendered her suicide bomb in Iraq. Young people just 18 years are asked to fight in wars overseas. In his House there an image of a Mambo puppet over an Iraqi car bomb attack against US soldiers.

Some of the images that will on Waterford buildings are quite strong says Liam Rellis of the Fringe Arts Festival.

The Munster Express building is one of the prominent properties in Waterford that is participating.

The Paper Mills, across the river has the largest piece of art, featuring a young Waterford girl, called Molly Crawford, daughter of Jenny Gaffney and who could be getting a trip to Los Angeles, so taken has Gottfried been by her image.

Pubs, hotels, shops and John Roberts Square all have strong photo realism images which is the style of Gottfried, with a narrative.



Pictured is internationally-renowned artist, Gottfried Helnwein, at the launch of the Waterford Fringe Festival at his castle at Kilsheelan, Co Tipperary with a piece from the collection from his instalment at the festival. Waterford Fringe Festival runs from 14 - 30 September in locations around Waterford city. This year's Festival will feature large scale installations – some reaching 120ft x 80ft in size - of Helnwein's work on buildings in the city. | Pic: Patrick Browne Jr.

It is basically an anti war exhibition that brings art to the public. Some of the images are bloody others have guns, so the reaction should prove interesting.

Children are exposed to too much today with media, electronic games and internet.

There are too many war like images seen from a young age, they are also sexualized too early through advertising and fashion images.

This removes their innocence too early in life, families need to intervene and stop these trends he feels and protect the age of innocence.

Gottfried loves Waterford, having lived in his castle just inside the Waterford borders for the past 12 years.

Wearing the Deise blue scarf on his head, a signature of his, he likes how the city centre is intact and well maintained. He described the city as cosy and specially beautiful on the water.

He loves the number of older buildings and likes to see them maintained and preserved yet still be functioning in a modern sense.

Austria has this sense of history and Ireland can do the same, combining the old with new, preserving the old architecture should be a priority in Waterford and business should understand that aesthetics are also important in addition to doing business.

Doing an installation in Waterford has been especially interesting,

He looks forward to a reaction from the people to the art and their feelings on war and young people.

He likes Ireland's uniqueness and Waterford in particular, a city he identifies with as he lives so close, he loves this size of urban environment.

The Fringe Festival is proud to present Gottfried Helnwein as the featured artist for 2008, and the organisers hope that his contribution will help this year's Festival capture the imagination of local people and the media alike, and to establish Waterford as a centre of international arts excellence. It would make for a great TV documentary.

Gottfried Helnwein, who has been living in Ireland for 12 years, is an internationally recognised artist, who has shown his work extensively throughout Europe, America and Asia.

Born in Austria, Helnwein 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 electronic rock band Rammstein, Andy Warhol, Mick Jagger, David Bowie, Nich Cage and Sean Penn, as well as hosting Marilyn Manson's wedding at his castle last year.

Gottfried counts fellow Austrian Arnold Schwarznegger the actor and governor of California among his friends.

Big Arnie has some of his art in his Governor's office, landscape of Death Valley in the California desert.

Gottfried says Arnie is an honest, straight politician and is there for the right reason, he already has wealth and fame, which often propels others. He cannot be blackmailed as he takes no salary from politics, added Gottfried.

Gottfried is a big believer in neutrality, which is enshrined in the Austrian constitution and he was glad to see Ireland vote No to Lisbon.

Ireland fought hard for freedom and waited a long time for it so why give it away in a treaty that event the Prime Minister has not read .

Irish farmers showed wisdom on not signing a contract that they had not read. They know the value of land and independence.

Other countries like Poland, Czech Republic and Germany are also having doubts, so he was happy with the NO vote. Gottfried is not a believer in European armies and is not afraid to express his views.

He likes Ireland that it is away from mainstream Europe and has its own culture, music and stories. People are more innocent in the countryside here and less cynical and he liked that about young people. The strong family in Ireland also attracts him to live here.

He has been impressed by the Irish landscape and loves the Nire Valley, where he has done some landscape work.

Gottfried has a very supportive wife Renata and his two children, Mercedes and Cyril both are artists in their own right and will feature Exhibitions at the festival.

Helnwein has participated in projects as diverse as album covers, books, and designs for theatre, opera and film as well as the large scale installations for which he is so well-known. He has exhibited at the Crawford Gallery in Cork, but Los Angeles in the USA, Vienna and Prague are where he also has regular exhibitions and where he has many clients. The National Gallery in Prague also recently featured his work.

Sometimes controversial, but always thought-provoking, Helnwein says: *"My art is not an answer - it is a question."* Francesco de Goya of Spain in 1808, is an artist of the past that he admires.

He told the Munster Express that at some point he would like to make a movie and get involved in one but has no time at present.

Waterford Fringe Festival is an annual multi-disciplinary Arts Festival that features an exciting mix of music, comedy and family events.

For more information go to www.helnwein.com or www.waterfordfringefestival.com.