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Art controversy: Deputy Mayor supports rights of artists

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by Kieran Walsh

Controversial artist Gottfried Hellwein, the Austrian artist who has put up a special anti war art exhibition around buildings in Waterford recently spoke of his reasons for putting up art at the launch of his exhibition at Greyfriars Waterford last weekend.

Deputy Mayor of Waterford Cllr. Pat Hayes accepted that some people might find the art upsetting especially the one of the blood of a child and the white blue eyed children with guns.

However, he defended the rights of artists to provoke a reaction and get people to think.

Sometimes provocative art can be effective and in this respect war is often seen as far away, but if the children had Asian and or African faces with guns would there have been as strong a reaction.

Children and war were a theme of Hellwein's exhibition, some people asked were the works photos or real. The Deputy Mayor complimented the artist and noted how art can provoke and that we should be tolerant and allow artists express themselves and not try and censor them.

The Deputy Mayor remarked how in the bad old days of the thirties and fifties that artists and writers had to leave Ireland to express their works.

Censorship meant that books were not published, authors had to go elsewhere to have them published whether the UK, Europe or America, added the Deputy Mayor.

Now times are different but still artists are getting criticised for their work, added Cllr. Hayes, who defended the role of the artists .

The work has created a lot of interest around the city and has enabled people to see art outside a museum area, often the average person may not visit a museum or gallery to see such art, therefore displaying an exhibition on the street brings it out into the open.



In Europe this is done to some extent and here in Waterford, we have had the Spraoi parades so we are not unused to art in a street background.

This exhibition says the organisers has really catapulted Waterford in to the lime light and shown it to be a lively city where art is important and where people allow such work to be shown. One Waterford child is in the artwork the others are from the USA, where Gottfried does much work.

Gottfried says he loves Waterford and its nice old buildings. It is a city with much character, much of the city's inner core has been retained and this makes it a great place to display art.

The exhibition was a big challenge and he was delighted with the support he received from the organisers and those with whom they had linked up with to display the art.

They wanted to contact real people in real life and show them with this art. The reaction in some cases has been emotional. He has learned from the experience, public reaction is important and is sometimes spontaneous.

He has gone on national and local radio explaining the exhibition and how children are used and exploited in war.

Art he says is a dialogue, musicians play music on a stage and get an instant reaction in a Live gig.

Painters communicate differently and often get a slower reaction, when they complete their work, which is done alone they must then wait for an exhibition then find out what people think.

He was happy to get a reaction to his work and is grateful that Waterford hosted his work, a city and county that he is proud of to live in.

He now calls Waterford home, even though he travels much to Los Angeles and Europe for his work. Waterford may have changed a little but still retains its origins unlike other modern big cities.

From Vienna, he is living here more than 10 years in Ireland. Gottfried just lives within the county boundary of Waterford at Kilsheelan, where the fringe festival was launched.

He noted his contribution last year and now this has extended to art outside galleries but out into the street.

He recommended people to buy the work as they might get great value from it.

Waterford is getting more and more festivals from the new Terra Madre food festival, Spraoi, The Tall Ships in 2011, John Roberts Festival and Imagine festival as well as the Opera Festival that was deferred this year.

Conor Nolan, Waterford City Arts Officer was last to speak at this well attended gathering, he quoted Aristotle and Plato in his talk and advocated that artists had the right to express themselves.

Aristotle said that society needed to be shown things. Sometimes art can depict tragedy and the common man. High Art and tragedy can come together. The Waterford exhibition is different from the norm. Irishman Samuel Beckett, who was later based in Paris said art challenges us to look at confusion.

Art is a question that the artist tries to solve and Gottfried he feels is trying to solve them.

Jim Gordon, Fringe Festival committee in summary mentioned the success of the exhibition and the great publicity it had generated on TV and on radio.