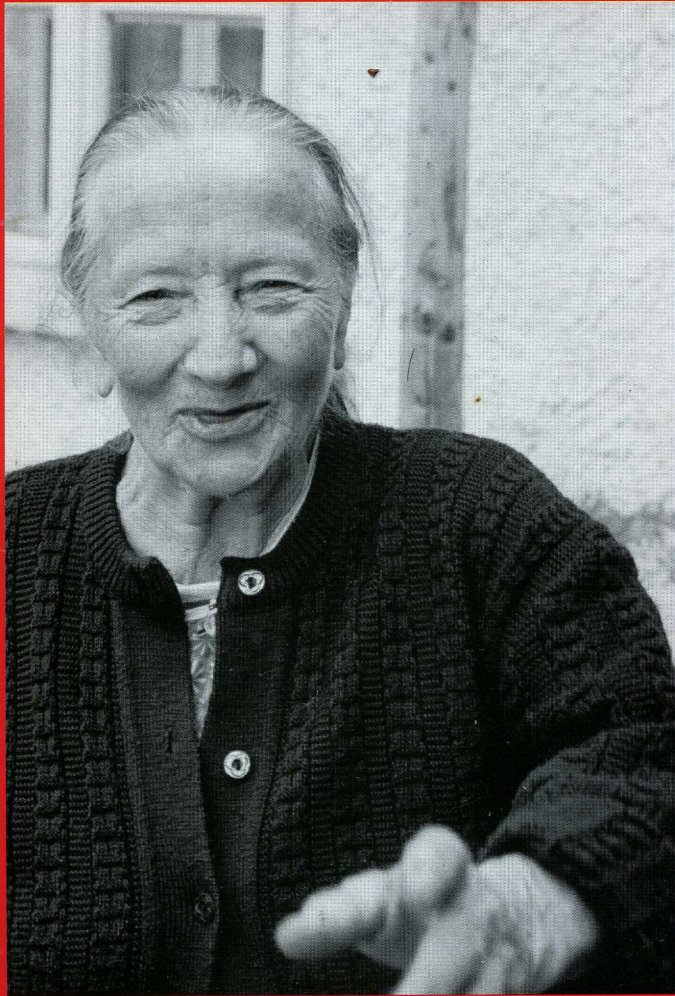


CONTEXTS

ARTS AND PRACTICE IN IRELAND

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Constance Short on child art... Tom Jennings on protest art...
Carmel Maginn on intergenerational art... Dave Duggan on
social theatre... Roisin Burke on Critical Voices...

Art in Defence of Humanism - My Inner Beast by Jens Galschiot

Emigrants: A Photo Essay

Gwen Wilkinson documents a shared experience as Irish & Polish young people explore emigration through drama.

In August of this year I had the opportunity to journey to Poland and document, through photographs, a ten day theatre workshop with members of Youth Theatre Tipperary (YTT) and members of Polish youth theatres. The venture came about through the collaboration of YTT and a Polish organisation, The Association of Creative Initiatives (ACI). Leargas, who actively encourage cultural exchange, provided additional assistance. The theme of the workshop was Polish and Irish experiences of emigration. Workshop sessions included interviews with local villagers, discussions and rehearsals, culminating in the production of a play, *Emigrants*.

The Irish group consisted of nine members of YTT, and one from Cahir Youth Theatre; two workshop directors, Pat Burke and Patricia McHale and one administrator. The Polish group comprised of ten youth selected from throughout Poland by ACI, one workshop director, Ida Bocian,

and two administrators from ACI, Marta Bialek and Piotr Stasik.

For the duration of the workshop we were based in the small rural village of Niedamirow, in South West Poland, close to the border of the Czech Republic. Our accommodation and workspace was the unique 'House of Three Cultures', owned and run by Polish artists, Beata Justa and her husband, Grzegorz Potoczak. Their extraordinary, rambling house facilitates artists from around the world to host seminars, develop projects and exchange ideas.

The particular area of Poland that we were based in has had a long history of emigration and immigration. Before the Second World War the area was under German administration and was predominantly settled with Germans. After the War it came under Polish control. The German inhabitants were forced to leave and their houses and farms were resettled



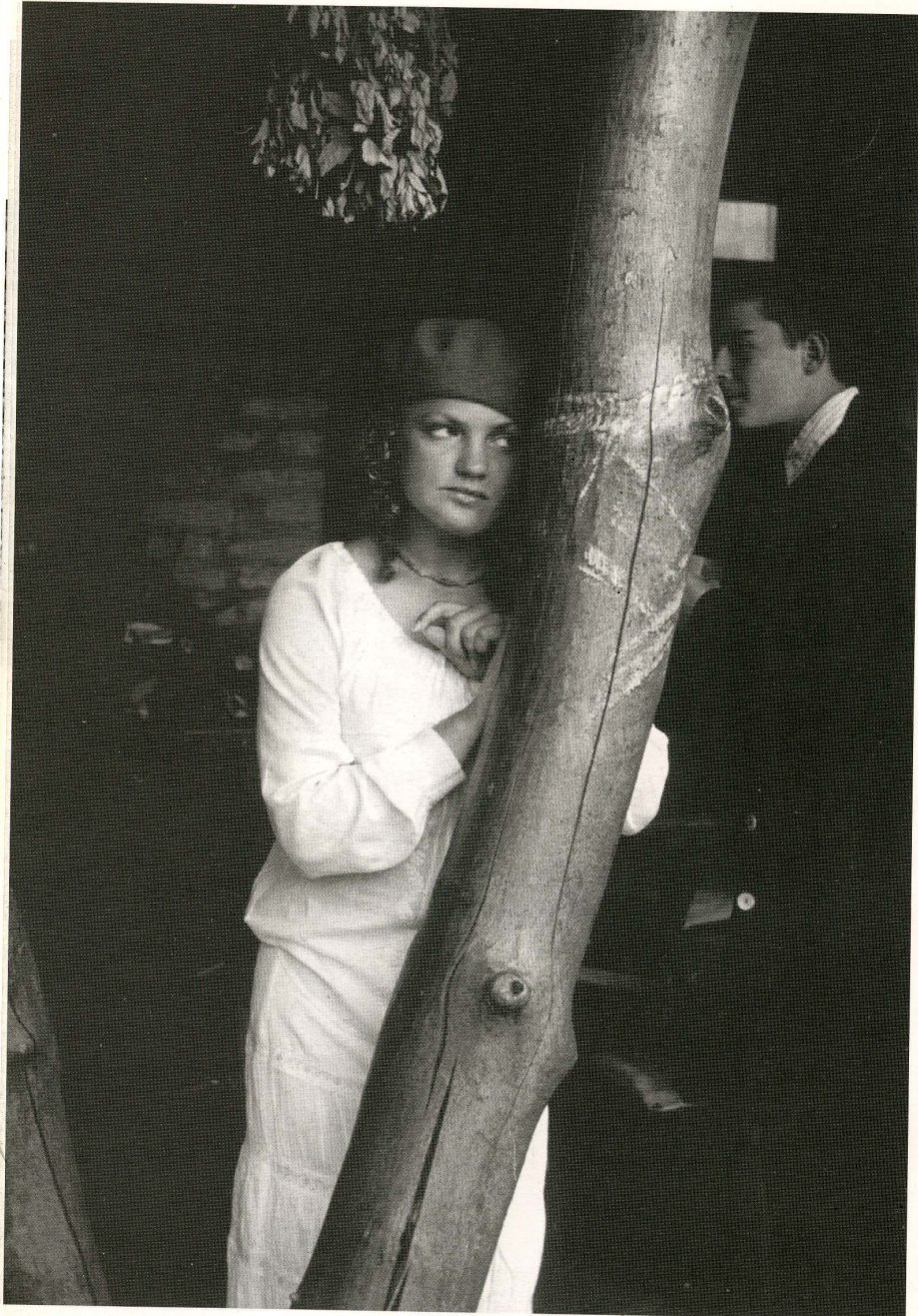
with Polish people. One of the first tasks for the workshop participants was to interview families and individuals in the village about their experiences of emigration and displacement. Drawing on their stories, the students constructed various scenes that were gradually refined into a performance piece. Due to the complexities of language it was decided that the emphasis would be placed on movement and mime, in addition to music and song, as the most effective means of communication. Scenes in the performance explored issues such as eviction, relocation, loss of identity, beurocracy, racism, fear, reunion and hope.

The intensive workshop culminated in a fifty-minute public performance

in the historic main square of Lubawka (pop. 20,000), the closest town to Niedamirow. It was performed at night in the open air, with only the existing street lights and two powerful floodlamps to light the natural stage. Costumes were borrowed from a second-hand clothes shop in Lubawka. Over 600 people attended the performance.

The following is a selection of black and white photographs taken over the course of the workshop. They include portraits of Polish and Irish theatre students, villagers and scenes from rehearsals of the performance. The prints formed part of an exhibition of 26 photographs that took place at The Excel Gallery, Tipperary Arts Centre in October 2003.





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**Photograph Titles
'Emigrants'**

P31: Village Children - Niedamirow

P32: Ala Derwich - Scene from
'Emigrants', Dress Rehearsal,
Lubawka, Poland.

P33: Beata Justa and Son Olda -
Hosts of 'The House of Three
Cultures'

P34: Ola Daniluk - Polish Theatre
student

P35: Emilia - Member of The
Association of Creative Initiatives,
Poland.

P36: a) Edel Byrnes (YTT) - Scene
from 'Emigrants', Dress Rehearsal,
Lubawka, b) Group - Youth Theatre
members from Tipperary and Poland

P37: a) Rhea Kelly (YTT) - Scene
from 'Emigrants', Dress Rehearsal,
Lubawka. b) ditto.

P38: Grzegorz Potoczak, Beata
Justa and Olda - Hosts, 'The House
of Three Cultures'.

P39: The House of Three Cultures -
Theatre Workshop base,
Niedamirow.

P40: Family - Niedamirow Village,
Poland

P41: Villager - Niedamirow

YTT = Youth Theatre Tipperary
CYT = Cahir Youth Theatre

