

The Four Dublin Local Authorities  
in association with the NCH present:

# Exploring & Thinking

Presentations on Early  
Childhood Arts Commissions



National Concert Hall  
24th of January 2019

# Introduction

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*Exploring and Thinking* is a collaborative framework for early childhood arts in the Dublin region. It came about in 2016 when the four Dublin Local Authorities partnered for the first time to collectively consider early childhood arts provision in the Dublin region.

The project partners made a successful application for Arts Council funding under the Invitation to Collaboration Scheme 2016. The joint proposal focused on commissioning and touring new artwork to the four Local Authority areas with local engagement programmes, in arts and non-traditional arts venues.

The *Exploring and Thinking* framework culminated in the commissioning of two unique projects:

- » **Anna Newell, *I Am Baba* - A new immersive theatre piece for babies aged 0-12 months.** A full commission for the development, creation and tour of *I Am Baba* to the four Local Authority areas.
- » **Helen Barry and Eamon Sweeney, *Sculptunes* - A modular interactive music-producing sculpture.** A research and development commission, which supported the artists to develop one piece of the original six-piece *Sculptunes* proposal and test this musical sculpture with children and early childcare practitioners.

The Local Authority partnership in association with the NCH now wish to share the commissioned work and invite you to hear from the commissioned artists. A publication capturing a review of the commissioning process, outputs and impacts of the collaborative framework, alongside additional research conducted among the artists and key personnel will be presented on the day.

Dr. Michelle Downes has been invited as keynote speaker to share some of her insights and findings on brain and behaviour development in the first years of life. The inclusion of a space for reflection and discussion is included in the day's events in the form of round table discussions. Attendees are invited to communicate their experience of working in the early childhood arts sector with the local authority partners.

Cover image:

Illustration by Beth O'Halloran

# Schedule

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9.45am	<b>Registration</b>
10am	<b>Welcome &amp; overview of the commissioning partnership, process and outcomes.</b> Orla Scannell, Arts Officer of South Dublin County Council & Julie Clarke Youth & Education Officer of Fingal County Council.
10.15am	<b>Presentation of <i>Sculptunes</i></b> Artists Helen Barry & Eamon Sweeney will present the research & development of <i>Sculptunes</i> .
11am	<b>Tea / Coffee break</b>
11.15am	<b>Presentation of <i>I Am Baba</i></b> Artist Anna Newell will present her experience of making art for the very young with a specific focus on the creation of <i>I Am Baba</i> .
12 noon – 1pm	<b>Round table discussion.</b> Liz Coman Assistant Arts Officer of Dublin City Council will facilitate reflections from the audience.
1pm – 1.45pm	<b>Lunch</b> (a light lunch will be provided)
1.45pm	<b>Dr. Michelle Downes: What do babies know?</b> Dr. Michelle Downes will discuss brain and behaviour development during these first few years of life, and the important role that environment plays in this development. She will explore some of the questions being asked by scientists and the neuropsychology research happening at the newly established UCD Babybrains Lab.
2.20pm	<b>Closing Remarks</b> Máire Davey, Participation & Learning Assistant Arts Officer of Dún-Laoghaire Rathdown County Council.

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This is a **free event**, but **booking is required**.

Bookings will be available through the NCH box office at [www.nch.ie](http://www.nch.ie) or by phone at 01 417 0000

# Biographies

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**ANNA NEWELL** [www.annanewell.co.uk](http://www.annanewell.co.uk)

Anna has been making theatre adventures for people of all ages since 1989 - in theatres of all sizes, in a disused police station, in a shopping centre, on a barge, in a sonic lab, in a hydropool and in a secret apartment - in the UK, Ireland, the US, South Africa and Bosnia. Her Early Years work has been seen on 5 continents. She introduced theatre for children with PMLD into Ireland, helped start babytheatre in South Africa and created the world's first BabyDay. Finalist, international Ellen Stewart Award for 'theatremakers whose work has had a major impact on children/young people'. Received one of the inaugural Tonic Theatre Awards for 'game-changing women who are transforming theatre and the performing arts'. Previously - Artistic Director, Replay Theatre Co, Artistic Director CETL(NI): The Centre for Excellence in the Creative and Performing Arts, Queens, and Associate Director, Dundee Rep. Anna relocated to Bray in 2016.

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**HELEN BARRY**

Helen is a visual artist and classically trained dancer based in Dublin. Her collaborative work with children is integral to her practice and she has completed several long-term artist residencies in early years settings and primary schools. Helen works with artists and mentors across various arts disciplines. Her work takes the form of interactive sculptural works, installations, performances, inventive musical instruments, sound works, textiles, printmaking, artist residencies and workshops. Helen is also a published children's author and illustrator. She has over 30 years experience working creatively with children, adults and older people through community participation and arts education programmes and lecturing in 3rd level institutions developing early arts training modules.

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**EAMON SWEENEY**

Eamon Sweeney is an experienced musician with a love for early years engagement. He regularly provides workshops, performances and classes for institutions such as the ARK Children's Cultural Centre, Music Generation, Music Network, and various national local authorities and statutory bodies. Eamon received the first musicology doctorate awarded by DIT Conservatory of Music and Drama and teaches and performs extensively in a variety of genres and styles – giving broadcasts, lectures and seminars in Ireland and abroad. He is committed to the provision of Community Music and Music in Healthcare Settings and works with the RIAM, KWETB, CDETB and Music Generation Wicklow. He is an artistic director of Alchemy Music in Wicklow – a music-in-the-community initiative.

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**DR. MICHELLE DOWNES**

Dr. Michelle Downes is assistant professor and lecturer with UCD School of Psychology. Prior to joining UCD in 2016 she worked as a research associate at UCL Institute of Child Health where she also obtained a PhD in developmental cognitive neuroscience. Her PhD investigated the development and assessment of executive functions in typically developing children as well as preschool children with sickle cell disease using electroencephalography, eye-tracking, and behavioural methods. She completed an Msc in Paediatric Neuropsychology at UCL (with distinction) and holds a 1.1 BA (Hons) degree in Psychology from the National University of Ireland, Galway. She is particularly interested in the development of executive functions and early learning skills and how these can be assessed in young children in an ecologically valid way.

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