

## **Presentation by Mary Moynihan**

**For the European Observatory on Memories (EUROM) third annual network meeting Taking Stock of European Memory Policies  
Best practices, remembrance projects and dissemination strategies  
10 December 2020**

### **A People's Parliament**

*'I think there is no straight road, no straight road in this world,  
only a giant labyrinth, of intersecting crossroads'*  
Federico García Lorca

Good morning, it gives me great pleasure to be here with you all this morning to talk about the work of Smashing Times and a special thanks to the European Observatory on Memories (EUROM) for inviting us to attend. My name is Mary Moynihan. I am a writer, theatre and filmmaker and Artistic Director of Smashing Times International Centre for the Arts and Equality.

As an artist my job is to tell stories. I believe storytelling is worthwhile when it shares our values and beliefs and what we stand for.

Smashing Times was set up in 1991 as a professional organisation using the arts to promote equality, human rights and diversity and from the beginning storytelling has been a key part of what we do. We use theatre workshops, theatre performances, films, panel discussions, books and art exhibitions to tell stories that promote human rights and equality. Theatre and film are often the places we go to on a voluntary basis to hear someone else's story, we give ourselves permission to step into someone else's shoes and through the arts we can tell stories that can inspire new visions for the future.

I first became involved creatively in using historical memory as a form of storytelling through our peacebuilding work in Northern Ireland. We worked in Northern Ireland in the 1990's, before the ceasefires and we continued our work in a post-conflict environment after peace was established, using the arts to promote peace building and reconciliation. A key part of the work was bringing different communities together with a focus on telling the hidden or denied stories of the conflict, and finding ways to create a more diverse narrative.

Owing to the the success of our work in peacebuilding and bringing different communities together, we were invited by different organisations to work across Europe. We had colleagues in European countries who were at the coalface of the refugee displacement of people and we came together using the arts to promote anti-racism, gender equality and

inclusion. The work proved highly successful with many organisations continuing to use the workshop models we had developed long after the projects were over.

### **Decade of Commemorations**

At the same time in Ireland, around 2015 to 2016, the Decade of Commemorations was taking place. Ireland was remembering its past history of its struggle for independence and Smashing Times were asked would we consider exploring women's stories from 1916.

In 1916 a group of men and women including activists, artists and poets took part in an insurrection against British rule that lasted for six days. This insurrection failed but was a catalyst for the war of independence that followed in Ireland. I like to mention this because for many years in Ireland, we were under the impression that there were very few women involved in the Irish uprising of 1916. As we now know over 300 women took part with many of these stories now being brought to light by historians today. Smashing Times were delighted to link with historians including Dr Sinead McCool and with Dublin Castle, where we created a number of performances and a film highlighting these stories of Irish women who stood up for freedom. *Masculinised* memories of history are the norm and the role of powerful women are side-lined and forgotten so telling women's stories is important. What struck me about the women's stories from 1916 in Ireland was that many of the women fought not just for freedom, they also had a desire for a complete transformation of society that was radical in terms of its focus on social justice and gender equality. There are many incredible women's stories out there that deserve to be acknowledged by a wider audience.

Arising out of our work telling hidden narratives from Irish history we decided to submit an application to the Europe for Citizens programme of the European Union which was successful. The project was Women, War and Peace and the aim was to use creative processes of theatre and film to explore the experiences of women in Europe from WWII and to link those stories to the promotion of equality and peace in Europe today. This project resulted in a theatre performance, a film and a book with a foreword by Marian Harkin, MEP. The book contains 23 women's stories from WWII and the Holocaust - highlighting stories of women from Ireland, Spain, Germany and Poland who promoted liberty, spoke out against totalitarianism and advocated for peace.

We went on to create projects including Women in an Equal Europe and Comet Lines – Freedom Trails of Europe and discovered numerous stories of courageous Irish men and women who were active in the Resistance and in escape lines during WWII and who stood side-by-side with their fellow citizens from across Europe in the fight against tyranny. I think this is important because Ireland is on the edge of Europe and was neutral during WWII, yet we have numerous narratives of Irish women and men who went to Spain, Germany, Belgium, and other countries and who were involved on a humanitarian level and in many other ways right up to active combat as they stood up against Nazism, Fascism and totalitarianism.

The Comet Lines project uses creative processes of theatre workshops, performances, film and new digital technologies to promote a remembrance of European history with a focus on 'Escape Lines' during WWII. 'Escape lines' were secret World War II networks set up to

assist Allied soldiers and citizens leave Nazi occupied territory during WWII. We remember Belgium woman **Andrée Eugénie Adrienne de Jongh** (1916-2007), nickname Dédée de Jongh, who set up the Comet line which is estimated to have taken in or repatriated some 800 Allied, mainly British servicemen who themselves were aided by over 3,000 civilians, approximately 700 of whom were arrested and some 290 shot dead or died during deportation.<sup>1</sup>

We remember **Mary Elmes** (1908-2002), a Cork woman who was the first Irish person honoured as 'Righteous Among Nations' for her work saving Jewish children from the Nazi gas chambers during World War II. The story of Mary Elmes has many parallels today. Mary was actively involved in helping refugees who were fleeing from war and persecution. Today we are witnessing the flight of ordinary men, women and children from war and there is an onus on all of us to support in whatever way we can. The story of Mary Elmes appears in an original play created by Smashing Times titled *The Woman is Present: Women's Stories of WWII*. When Smashing Times first produced this play in 2016 a journalist called Clodagh Finn came to see the production. She was so moved by the evocative portrayal of Mary Elmes that she set about piecing together the real-life story of how this courageous Cork woman saved hundreds of lives in Franco's Spain and Nazi-occupied France. She trawled archives in Paris, London and the US and managed to track down several of the refugees that Mary saved as children. As a result Clodagh was able to publish a book in 2018 called ***A Time to Risk All***, the incredible untold story of Mary Elmes, the Irish woman who saved children from Nazi Concentration Camps, now published by Gill Books and on the bestseller list in Ireland. We were delighted with the news that Cork's newest bridge has been named after Mary Elmes and was officially launched in September 2019.

Other women whose stories we tell include **Maureen Patricia O'Sullivan** who parachuted into France for the SOE to work as a radio operator; **Mary Cummins** (1905-1999), a woman from Dublin who joined the Belgium Resistance during WWII and **Katherine (Kate) Anne Mc Carthy** (1895-1971), also known as Sr Marie-Laurence, a nun who 'helped 120 allied servicemen escape from German occupied France and was condemned to death by the Nazis and sent to Ravensbruck Concentration Camp where she nearly starved, contracted typhus and was four times designated for the crematorium by the 'hunter' who selected women unfit for hard labour.<sup>2</sup> She survived the war but many others did not. Women such as Irish woman **Catherine Crean** who was involved in the escape lines during the war and who tragically died in Ravensbruck Concentration Camp for Women and whose life we know very little about. We remember these brave women and men.

What strikes me is the way in which ordinary people from different countries across Europe came together during WWII in solidarity with each other, ordinary people risking their lives for 'strangers', showing courage in times of adversity. These men and women, each in their

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.azkunazentroa.eus/az/ingl/activities/the-comet-line-%E2%80%93-the-escape-network/al-evento-fa>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.google.ie/amp/s/www.irishtimes.com/culture/heritage/paris-honours-irish-who-fought-spied-and-died-for-france-1.1954055%3fmode=amp>

own unique way, stood up for the right of all human beings to be treated equally and with respect. I believe their stories need to be told at a wider level to inspire the importance of working together to promote democracy, peace and equality for all. This solidarity of people in the resistance and in escape lines during WWII underpins the founding of the EU which was set up to end the wars between European countries, to promote freedom and peace as well as economic and political unity.

## **EU 1979 Exhibition**

One of the stories of the Holocaust is that of French woman Simone Veil who became the first president of the first European parliament elected by universal suffrage in 1979.

In 2020 Smashing Times set up a unique project called **EU 1979: A People's Parliament - Democracy, Human Rights and Women's Political Participation**. The project was implemented by Smashing Times in partnership with Dona Daria, the Netherlands; University of Hannover, Germany and Francais Pour L'Insertion Sociale et Professionnelle en Europe, Paris, France, and was co-funded by the Europe for Citizens Programme of the European Union; with support from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Communicating Europe Initiative, and the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

Arising out of this project we created the online exhibition called EU 1979: A People's Parliament. The exhibition remembers and celebrates the stories of the 67 powerful women MEP's elected to the first European parliamentary in 1979 by universal suffrage and features the names and biographies of all 67 women elected, with the women acknowledged as trail blazing role models to inspire future generations. Out of the 410 MEP's elected in the 1979 European parliamentary elections by universal suffrage, 67 (16%) were women with 2 women MEP's from Belgium, 5 from Denmark, 12 from Germany, 18 from France, 2 from Ireland, 11 from Italy, 1 from Luxemburg, 5 from The Netherlands and 11 from the United Kingdom.

The exhibition is divided into four galleries. **Gallery One** is called Historical Remembrance and provides information on WWII and the founding of the EU. **Gallery Two** features information on the 1979 European Parliamentary elections alongside the Biographies and a photograph for each of the 67 female MEPs elected. **Gallery Three** is titled Voices Today and here we learn about the state of play in the European Parliament today, women's role within Europe and hopes for the future as well as listen to interviews with eight MEP's from across Europe – from Ireland, France, the Netherlands and Germany and gain a deeper insight into what it is like to be an MEP. The Eight MEP's are Dennis de Jong, the Netherlands; Kim van Sparrentak, MEP, the Netherlands; Frances Fitzgerald, MEP, Ireland; Barry Andrews, MEP, Ireland; Salima Yenbou, MEP, France; Marie-Pierre Vedrenne, MEP, France; Len Dupont, MEP, Germany and Maria Noichl, MEP, Germany.

**Gallery Four** is our Virtual Art Exhibition space and here we discover the wonderful artistic creations by a range of artists from across four European countries – Ireland, the Netherlands, Germany and France. The exhibition features visual artworks, film, poetry,

stories, images and posters. What all the artists share is a belief that art can serve as a catalyst for celebrating and raising awareness of human rights and for the promotion of political debate on democracy, equality and peace. Key artists include visual artist Hina Khan originally from Pakistan and now living in Ireland. Artist Hina Kahn came with her family from Pakistan to Ireland to seek freedom and has created a powerful image inspired by the story of Simone Veil. Hina says 'I am inspired by Simone's work as a parliamentarian. She was a powerful and exemplary women and a source of encouragement for us all'.

Other artists include award winning Irish writer and poet Feilim James who contributed the artwork 'This Sleeping Heart', a poem about indifference and inaction in the face of suffering, and the destructiveness of the human condition. We have a powerful poem and video titled *God is a We* created by Luis Bracamontes, an award-winning queer, feminist, Spoken Word poet, originally from Mexico and now living in Rotterdam, the Netherlands. We have work by visual artist Noelle McAlinden from Northern Ireland who understands life lived during conflict and how equality and human rights underpin the peace process in Northern Ireland and the importance of highlighting freedom and democracy in society today.

Also from the Netherlands are Nazrina Rodjan, an illustrator and animator from Hidden Lion Studio, based in Rotterdam, the Netherlands; and Jobert Tremus, a fashion designer. The artists from Germany are Farnaz Nasiriamini, a freelance journalist and author interested in telling stories to inspire reflection and action and Marianna Tuokkola, a photographer. The artists from France are Snježana Šimić, a photographer, Gilles Lange, a photographer and poet and Michel Dizel, a teacher and writer.

## **A Europe of Solidarity**

The president of the first European Parliament, Simone Veil, survived Auschwitz, and Bergen – Belsen. She was 16 years old when she and her family were deported from France to concentration camps where her parents and brother perished. Simone remembers how in the camps, women showed an immense capacity for resistance and helped each other in generous, unselfish ways. Simone survived through courage and determination. After the war, Simone becomes a French lawyer and politician and Minister for Health where she presided over the first bill legalizing abortion. She has always fought to defend the rights of women, as well as prisoners and children. In 1979, Simone becomes the first President of the European Parliament and was committed to a Europe of solidarity in which such atrocities as happened during WWII can never happen again.

Louise Weiss (1893–1983) was a journalist, politician, feminist and lifelong champion of European values and women's rights. She was an influential voice in French and international affairs from the 1920s until her death in 1983. Her experiences working in field hospitals during the First World War profoundly affected her. She dedicated her life to the pursuit of peace, first through her work on several newspapers and then in her dedication to the cause of female suffrage; her belief being that giving women the vote would help prevent the looming threat of a Second World War. During that war, she helped save thousands of Jewish

children from the Nazis and joined the French Resistance. Post-war, she promoted the idea of Europe as a counterpoint to the superpowers during the Cold War. She was elected to the European Parliament in 1979 at the age of 86, and made the inaugural speech at its opening session. After her death, the European Parliament named its main building in Strasbourg after her in recognition of her lifelong support of European values.

Another woman whose biography features in the exhibition is Emma Bonino, a member of the Italian radical party who was interested in promoting human rights, and women's issues, divorce, abortion and an end to gender based violence. She has served continuously as a politician either in the Italian political system or as an MEP in the European parliament apart from when she was appointed between 1994 and 1999 as European Commissioner.

We also feature the story of Barbara Anne Castle, Baroness Castle of Blackburn (1910-2002) who was born Barbara Anne Betts in Derbyshire, England. She grew up in a politically engaged environment and joined the Labor party in her teens. She became a British Labour party politician and was elected to the St Pancras Metropolitan Borough Council from 1937 until 1945. During the 1945 general elections in Great Britain which Labour won by a landslide, she was elected as a Member of Parliament for Blackburn and served from 1945 to 1978, retaining the seat for 34 years. She became the longest-serving MP in the history of the House of Commons until 2007 when the record was then taken by Gwyneth Dunwoody. She was elected a member of the European parliament for Greater Manchester from 1979 to 1989 and then became a member of the House of Lords after she was granted life peerage in 1990.

During her time in politics she had the nickname 'the Red Queen' because of her red hair and fiery speeches. Barbara Anne Castle became one of the most important Labour movement politicians and was an outstanding author and activist. She advocated for an 'ethical socialism' and spoke out on a range of humanitarian and political issues advocating for example for the anti-fascism, anti-colonialism and anti-apartheid movements. 'Throughout her political career, she maintained a hard-headed pragmatism. Her ambition, she said, was "to inch people towards a more civilised society".'

In addition to the biographies of the 67 women elected to the first European parliamentary elections, we have also included the biographies of four women who were not involved in that parliament yet played a key role in its development. These women were Ursula Hirschmann (1913-1991) from Germany who was a committed anti-Fascist and founding European federalist and Nicole Fontaine (1942-2018) from France who was a politician and educator and who became the European Parliament's second female President. Nicole was a persuasive politician and devoted champion of Europe who oversaw the adoption of the euro and the implementation of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. She played a key role in promoting human rights throughout her lifetime.

Melina Mecouri (1920-1994) was a Greek actor, politician and a champion of culture. She became famous as an actor on stage and in film and spent many years campaigning around the world for the removal of the military junta in Greece. After democracy was restored in 1974, she became Minister of Culture for Greece and a champion of Greek and European culture and she played a key role in the European Capital of Culture initiative. The fourth person is Dutch woman Marga Klompé (1912-1986) who was a scientist, politician and

champion of the underprivileged. She was active in the Dutch resistance and was one of the negotiators for the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights. In 1956 she became the Netherlands' first female government minister.

One of the MEPs interviewed in the exhibition from today is Kim van Sparrentak, a young, Dutch politician who speaks in an inspiring and refreshing way about the diverse changes happening in the European parliament, highlighting the role of powerful women trailblazers and the need for inclusion and diversity into the future. She says that ' . . . we are trying to create a more social Europe and a more equal Europe, I work a lot in LGBT rights, women's rights, gender equality and disability rights'. She also said, 'I am going to stand there, I am going to tell my story . . . show what we can do to make people's voices be heard that are not being heard at all in society'. She describes how 'Simone Veil . . . she was a real feminist . . . and she became the president (of the first European parliament elected by universal suffrage), that is really cool . . . it was a good start but we didn't manage to keep it up'.

We didn't manage to keep it up. Unfortunately, after Simone Veil, no other woman has occupied the position of leadership that she held to this day. The EU is committed to gender equality and more work needs to be done to continue to promote the equal representation of women in politics and in wider society.

An important step forward was the election of German politician Ursula von der Leyen, as President of the European Commission since 1 December 2019.

### **Dissemination**

Smashing Times tell these stories in schools and communities through performances, films and storytelling. The reaction is always overwhelmingly positive. Young people and adults love these stories. Some of the stories may have dark elements yet a joyous energy is created when the stories are told. People enjoy and relate to these stories especially young people because they are personal stories that touch people on an emotional level and create a sense of a shared humanity. The problem is people don't hear about these stories enough. We regularly work with schools and universities where young people have never heard of these stories until we come in and tell them, so we need to continue telling the stories to as wide an audience as possible through a range of methodologies including creative processes. Smashing Times reach over 200,000 on an annual basis with up to 10,000 taking part in activities directly.

Smashing Times have established an international Arts and Human Rights network bringing together a diversity of artists and communities who are interested in European solidarity and in using the arts to promote human rights across Europe. As artists working in human rights, we are creating work inspired by stories of individuals who stood up for the rights of others and who believed in a Europe dedicated to democracy, freedom, equality, human rights and diversity. The EU is founded on those principles and that is the message we need to get out and we can do this through storytelling and through the arts. By remembering and celebrating the contribution of 67 powerful women MEP's to the 1979 European elections, this project highlights the important role the EU can play in promoting democracy, human rights and equality for all, and the promotion of women in political life both at national and EU levels.

## Visions for the Future

In war there is no hierarchy of victims, everybody's story is important. As part of the Holocaust the Nazis murdered political prisoners, Roma, Christians, homosexuals, people with mental and physical disabilities, trade unionists, people of different ethnic groups, socialists, communists, pacifists, members of the Spanish International Brigades, Spanish Republican refugees, Catholics, Jehovah's Witnesses, conscientious objectors, resistance fighters and prisoners of war from many different countries. It is estimated that between 60 and 70 million people lost their lives as a result of the Second World War which was a truly global conflict and the greatest man-made disaster in history. Today there are tens of millions of citizens in Central and Eastern Europe who have or whose parents have suffered and whose sense of justice have not yet been satisfied. Those stories and experiences of communism have to be heard and acknowledged. We have to find ways to hear a diversity of voices and stories related to totalitarian and authoritarian regimes, stories from all sides, listened to by all sides.

As Simone Veil said, we cannot underestimate the fragility of peace and democracy. Going forward we would like to see a policy for using the arts as an inclusive way to acknowledge a diversity of stories and to promote remembrance, to tell the stories of all those who *risked their lives for others and who fought for a better future*. The fact that a range of projects are implemented on an annual basis to support remembrance, aided by the remembrance strand of the Europe for Citizens programme of the EU is in itself a success story and needs to be celebrated and supported into the future. We need to continue to share stories and to pass on values of Freedom, Democracy, Equality, Human Rights and Diversity.

Young people today get their news on social media, Instagram, snapchat, Tictok. We need to find ways to tell stories of European human rights defenders online in creative ways. Hate speech and intolerance are on the rise. Equality is essential in underpinning a strong democracy and we have witnessed in recent times how a lack of equality can undermine democratic structures. Unfortunately our colleagues in Poland, Hungary and Serbia are experiencing huge infringements on their civil and human rights today. We now know from our extensive work in historical memory how quickly the rise of the right can happen in Europe as it did in the lead up to WWII and based on what we are seeing today, we believe the EU needs to play a stronger role in advocating for governments to adhere to equality and human rights for all their citizens equally and for the EU to have a balance between the economic agenda and the human rights agenda across Europe. Covid-19 has brought into sharper focus the inequalities that exist. It has however, also highlighted the importance to all of us of interdependence and connectivity, within Ireland, and particularly between Ireland and Northern Ireland and across Europe.

I began by saying that storytelling is important when it defines what we stand for, and I am referring to values of peace, democracy, equality, human rights and diversity. Now is the time to stand up for the kind of EU and kind of future we want for our children, to define very clearly what are the values that we stand for, to get that message out through the stories of ordinary people from the past and today who stood up for the rights of others, to make these stories visible and celebrate the values that underpin the EU. We need to teach

our children how to fight and stand up in a non-violent way against intolerance and hatred, to be the resistance fighters or shadow warriors of today, to shine a light and illuminate minds and hearts when darkness is spreading, and to stand up for the fundamental values of freedom and human rights in our society when these values are under attack.

To finish we will see a short video clip from a piece on the life of German artist **Kathe Kollwitz**, as part of a series on the theme of Artists Against Fascism. Käthe Kollwitz (1867-1945) was a German artist known for her prints, woodcuts and sculptures, and their compassionate portrayal of human anguish and hardship, especially during wartime, with an emphasis on women and the working class. The loss of her second son Peter in World War I had a profound impact on her personal life and work. She used her work to express mourning and death and Kathe's famous No More War poster became a symbol of resistance to this day. An enlarged version of her sculpture Mother with her Dead Son is on display in Berlin as a memorial to all victims of war and dictatorship. Kathe had become a famous German artist by the rise of National Socialism, and the Gestapo carried out a year-long campaign to get Kollwitz to renounce her anti-Nazi stance, which she never did, although she carried a vial of poison with her in case she was arrested by the Nazis. In this piece Kathe is remembering her youngest son Peter who died in 1914 in the First World War and her growing commitment to pacifism. Thank you very much for listening.

Mary Moynihan



Mary Moynihan is an award-winning writer, director, theatre and film-maker, Artistic Director of Smashing Times International Centre for the Arts and Equality, and a Theatre Lecturer at the TU Dublin Conservatoire. As Artistic Director of Smashing Times, Mary specialises in using interdisciplinary, socially-engaged arts practice to promote human rights, peace building, gender equality and positive mental health, developing cutting edge arts-based projects with a range of organisations in Ireland, Northern Ireland and across Europe.

Mary has a particular focus on using historical memory in her artistic practice to promote a remembrance of stories of ordinary women and men from history and today. Projects led by Mary have won a number of awards including the Allianz Business to Arts Awards, a GSK Ireland Impact Award, a Dublin Bus Community Spirit Award, and a National Lottery Good Cause Award.

[www.smashingtimes.ie](http://www.smashingtimes.ie)

Link to EU 1979: A People's Parliament Virtual Art Exhibition:  
<https://exhibition.smashingtimes.ie/eu-1979-a-peoples-parliament/>

Project and Virtual Art Exhibition celebrating the 67 powerful women MEP's elected to the 1979 first European parliamentary elections. featuring work by artists from Ireland, the Netherlands, Germany and France.

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 Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Communicating Europe Initiative  
 Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht

**Presented for EU 1979: A People's Parliament**

– Democracy, Human Rights and Women's Political Participation

The project uses creative processes of film, a feminist framework and online digital resources to remember the first 1979 European parliamentary elections through a celebration of stories of 67 powerful women MEPs elected at that time. Out of the 410 MEP's elected in the 1979 European parliamentary elections by universal suffrage, 67 (16%) were women with 2 women MEP's from Belgium, 5 from Denmark, 12 from Germany, 18 from France, 2 from Ireland, 11 from Italy, 1 from Luxembourg, 5 from The Netherlands and 11 from the United Kingdom. The four European partners from Ireland, France, the Netherlands and Germany are:

Smashing Times, Dublin, Ireland  
 Francais Pour L'Insertion Sociale et Professionnelle en Europe, France  
 Dona Daria, Rotterdam, the Netherlands  
 University of Hannover, Germany

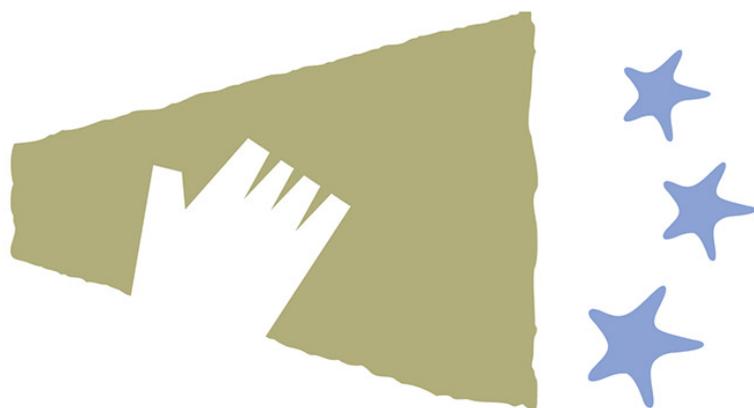
Link to promo for the Smashing Times International Centre for the Arts and Equality -  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-VklvHKtCp8>

Link to In Time - a poem film by Mary Moynihan which features in the Emotional Landscapes Exhibition and is a response to the Covid-19 pandemic and a reflection on hope for the future

<https://exhibition.smashingtimes.ie/emotional-landscapes/in-time/>



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Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta**  
Department of Culture,  
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