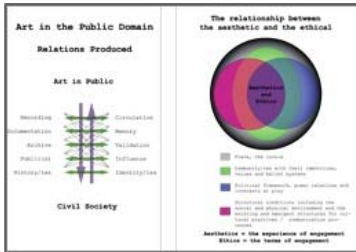


[Home](#) | [Seminars](#) | [Speakers' Profiles](#) | [Core Participants](#) | [Programme Structure](#) | [PDF List](#) | [Bibliography](#) | [About us](#)



Kerstin Mey: My name is Kerstin Mey. I am the Research Area Leader, 'Art in its Location' at *Interface*, University of Ulster in Belfast. *Interface* is a practice-led and interdisciplinary research centre established in 2004, headed up by Declan McGonagle. Our main focus is to look at the role of art, technologies and design in the society.

Interface has two strands. One of them is 'Art and its Locations'. It is concerned with two research foci: art in contested spaces – resulting from the context in which *Interface* was established. The second focus is 'Art and Documentation' which looks at ways in which the documentation of practices have contributed and played a crucial role in establishing memories of social and cultural practices. This therefore underpins the writing and rewriting of histories. The other major research strand at the University of Ulster is 'Fabric Forward' looking at the unifying of traditional technologies with digital progresses in the textile area.

I would like to talk about one particular project in the strand 'Art and its Location'. It has developed over the past half a year. We have been commissioned by the Department of Social Development in Northern Ireland to develop a Public Art Strategy for West Belfast and the Shankill area. For those of you who are not so familiar with the geography of Belfast, West Belfast and the greater Shankill area is one of the most contested interfaces in the city, where the nationalist and the loyalist communities come together, and are separated by a so-called Peace Wall.

The terms of reference for this commission stated that we were to develop a strategy that contributes, through art, towards the social and economic regeneration of the area particularly through an increase in tourism. We were also charged to develop connections with existing public art displays and resources of creativity and art in the area, as well as in the city.

We used the development of the Strategy as an opportunity to develop alternative models of engaging, through art, in the public domain. We called our strategy 'Growing public art' because the main aim of it can be framed by the need to 'connect the figure of the artist with the ground of community', to quote Declan McGonagle. Damian Killean talked about this need in his project very eloquently. The aim is to establish models where the communities in that area are empowered to take a lead in developing creativity in the public domain.

This can happen through a number of different models that work in parallel: artists engaging with communities and facilitating exchange besides traditional signature art processes. The Strategy proposes a decentralised approach that engenders community-driven further learning, skills exchange, and dialogue.

It is of paramount importance that communities, rather than local or regional authorities, become the main driver of developing creative strategies that are connected to the place and that can from there reach out to further afield. We developed the Strategy by going out into the communities and engaging in participatory exchange with the different stakeholders in the area. We used a number of different modes including round-table discussions; trust building by being *in situ*; and exploring the area through mapping. We have fed everything that we actually discovered and learnt back to the communities and invited responses. The communities have played an essential part in informing our Strategy which we have now handed over to the Department for Social Development. We hope that it is being taken as a template to develop further consultations in West Belfast and the Greater Shankill area and that it will result in different ways of making and understanding art in the public domain.

Thank you.

[<back to Seminar 4 menu](#)

