

Institute of Art, Design and Technology, Dun Laoghaire

School of Creative Arts

**How the Impacts of the Celtic Tiger on Irish Culture and  
Land is Reflected in Contemporary Irish Art**

Submitted to Department of Art and Design in candidacy  
for the Bachelor of Arts Honours Degree in Art 2025

## DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

This dissertation is submitted by the undersigned to the Institute of Art, Design and Technology, Dun Laoghaire in partial fulfilment of examination for the BA (Hons) in Art. It is entirely the author's own work except where noted and has not been submitted for an award from this or any other educational institute.

Signed 

Vanessa Brennan

## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis will analyse the Celtic Tiger's impact on Ireland as a country, on its economy, its social impact on the population and its effect on the arts. The thesis explores the boom & bust of the Celtic Tiger through the lens of contemporary art, at the time and presently. It closely examines contemporary artists whose work has been influenced by this period of rapid rise and fall in wealth and its effects on the landscape of the country and its people. Artists discussed include Graham Knuttel, Anthony Haughey, Eimear Walshe, Brian Maguire, Alice Lyons, Orla McHardy and more.

Further, this thesis will examine the intricacies of the economic rise and fall, homing in on the development, and consequential bursting, of the property bubble. Throughout the thesis, the underlying theme of sustainability and circular economy brings the narrative back to the impact of the Celtic Tiger on the landscape and the people in the country and how it was portrayed through time by artists.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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## Introduction

This thesis will analyse the development of Irish art practices during the period of economic prosperity in Ireland known as the Celtic Tiger and after during the country's period of austerity. How the art created reacts with the changing landscape and cultural shifts that were brought about by Ireland's biggest economic boom and bust in recent history.

Newton's law of universal gravitation, discovered by Sir Isaac Newton, states that every particle in the universe attracts every other particle with a force directly proportional to the product of their masses and inversely proportional to the square of the distance between their centres (Lasky, 2023). The force of gravity acting on an object is equal to the weight of the object (Lasky, 2023). On Earth, gravity pulls objects downward toward the center of the Earth due to the large mass of the planet, other planets with lesser or greater masses will have different amounts of gravitational pull, and thus objects will have different weights. (Lasky, 2023) This physics law is the root of the expression "what goes up must come down". As, due to gravity, objects cannot remain suspended in the air when a force drives them off the surface of the earth, they are inevitably pulled down towards the earth's centre (Lasky, 2023). Over time this phrase has gained additional meanings, relating to other theories, like the theory that something with a meteoric rise will eventually experience a fall, a way of saying that exponential growth is unsustainable, and sooner or later, everything comes back into balance. The phrase is used widely to describe numerous scenarios and phenomena, most people use it to describe how something good will not last forever, and you should prepare for the decline. The instances where this expression can be used, that are relevant to this thesis, are the boom and bust cycles of economics.



A boom and bust cycle refers to the alternating periods of economic growth and decline during an economic cycle, which is measured by an economy's gross domestic product (GDP), interest rates, total employment, and consumer spending (Quinn and Turner, 2020).

An economic cycle, also known as a business cycle, refers to economic fluctuations between periods of expansion and contraction (Quinn and Turner, 2020). The cycle can be defined by four stages; 'expansion', during which the economy rapidly grows, production increases and interest rates are low, though this period can provoke inflation, 'peak', when the growth hits its maximum height, prices stabilise for a short period before declining once more, 'contraction', growth slows, prices stagnate, employment falls, production levels are behind consumption levels leaving a surplus supply of products, and 'trough', this is the economy at its lowest point, this is the breaking point before the economy rises once more (Quinn and Turner, 2020). The Celtic Tiger was a time of intense expansion in Ireland's economy, hitting its peak in 2006/07, just before its fall in 2007/2008.

A notable time of boom in the Irish economy was characterised by a period of intense expansion dubbed 'The Celtic Tiger', which hit its peak in 2006/07. The phrase is thought to have been coined by Kevin Gardiner who first used it in a report for financial advisors Morgan Stanley, in 1994, foreshadowing the decade of economic growth (Burke-Kennedy, 2014). This period in Ireland is also referred to as 'The Boom'. Previously, Ireland had been one of Europe's poorest countries for over two centuries, then a combination of factors, and perhaps luck, in the mid-1990s, abruptly changed the financial outlook of Ireland and its economy for the coming decade. The start of this era coincided with the ceasefire of the Troubles in Northern Ireland in 1994 (Irish Republican Army (IRA), 2024), followed by the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, peace followed by prosperity. As Russett said in *Prosperity*

*and Peace: Presidential Address* (Russett, 1983): “Not only are peace and prosperity highly desirable goals independently, they may be linked causally to each other. There is evidence that many outbreaks of violent international conflict are a result of a loss of prosperity.”

Russett links conflict to a lack of prosperity, which implies a link between peace and prosperity. This financial spike brought about shifts in spending patterns throughout the country, with the individual having an increase in spending power, and changes to industry production, like the construction industry and property sector, which began to thrive. This led to a cultural shift that prioritised property buying (Simon and Stone, 2017).

The obsession with owning property was spurred on by the economy’s growth, people became set upon getting on the property ladder<sup>1</sup>. Buying a house moved away from owning a home and progressed to an investment, the population moved further away from vernacular architecture<sup>2</sup>. Construction companies mass producing carbon copy housing of poor standards became the norm. The heart and meaning were lost with greed for wealth replacing it.

Common practices that reflect a circular economy, like making products that last, repairing instead of replacing and maintaining quality over quantity, were breaking down from the rise of consumerism and capitalism. A linear economy focused on development and progress took hold, poor quality products made cheaper but for short-term use, discarded due to rapid wear and tear and replaced over and over. This applied to the construction industry at the time also, poor quality materials, and corners cut to save money and shorten turnaround time for investors leading to buildings that are already deteriorating 20 years later, as discussed later in Chapter 3 (Bielenberg, 2017).

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<sup>1</sup> The property ladder is a series of stages of owning properties of increasing values, first getting on the ladder by purchasing your initial property, the buyer is seen to progress up the ladder with each more expensive, ensuing purchase (Simon and Stone, 2017).

<sup>2</sup> Vernacular architecture is defined as a type of regional construction using traditional materials, resources and practices from the area where the building is located (Mitcham 2005).

Cultural and political topics like this have been at the centre of artists' work repeatedly, and the Celtic Tiger is no exception, with Irish artists both commenting on the period of economic expansion and contraction directly or inadvertently since it began. The after-effects of the biggest economic boom and bust in recent Irish history are relevant to this day as can be seen in the work of Eimear Walshe. It is no wonder this theme permeates the art scene, especially lying under art surrounding the housing crisis, like Eimear Walshe's piece *How Much no Thanks*, 2020, and *The Land Question: Where the fuck am I supposed to have sex?*, 2020, which both comment on the housing crisis in relation to sexuality and Irish colonial history. The works roots can partially be tied back to the burst of the property bubble that came about through The Boom and is one of the factors behind the housing crisis going on currently.



Figure 1: *How Much no Thanks* (2020), Eimear Walshe.

In the first chapter of this thesis, I will speak about how Ireland rapidly rose in economic status from one of the state's bleakest times of recession in the 1980s to becoming one of the world's wealthiest nations by 2000. Examining the boom in the construction industry at the time, with it becoming one of Ireland's most lucrative industries. This chapter will go on to speak on the societal impact of the Celtic Tiger while it was booming, and how the population reacted to an increased general wealth. Finally closing out with the economic impact on the arts in the country at the time and observing how artist Graham Knuttel's work seemed to capture the essence of the country at the time.

The second chapter of the thesis will present the fall of the Irish economy in 2007/2008.

Addressing the global financial crisis, the overreliance on the property sector by the country and touching on the Irish banking crisis. Describing events that led to the fall of the housing sector in Ireland, its effects are still being felt today. The chapter will define ghost estates and their impact on the landscape. Alongside this will be the artists Brian Maguire and Anthony Haughey's work, how they were influenced by this period of Irish history, and how the work aids in showing the impact of these events.

The final chapter of this thesis will be a deep dive into the artist Anthony Haughey, looking into his work and how it continuously speaks on the effect of political, economic and societal changes on the landscape he addresses and the people on it. Going back to his early works, looking at the art he created during the Celtic Tiger and after, how the work changed. The chapter will also cover Haughey's background in art and teaching, further developing his involvement in communities across the country and further. Exploring the ties between cultural events at the time the pieces that were being made and the work produced by Haughey, how the societal changes around him informed his work.

In the writing of this thesis, I hope to bring light to the impacts the Celtic tiger had on Ireland as a country, its economy, its landscape, and societal and cultural changes through artist's work. Using research to provide a substantial base of information on the economic rise and fall in Ireland from 1995-2007/2008 as a groundwork for further discussion. I will also examine the effects of this time on the land of the country through critical analysis of imagery in artworks. Focusing primarily on Anthony Haughey's work, comparing and contrasting work by the artist, surrounding land in Ireland. I aim to show the detachment, as a society, from sustainable living and circular economy, the give over to capitalism and consumerism.

# Chapter 1: The Boom

## 1. Introduction

How did Ireland's economy grow to the levels it was during the Celtic Tiger? What led to this boom in the economy and what did we do with this newfound wealth? This chapter will speak about how the country rapidly rose in economic status from one of the state's bleakest times of recession in the 1980s to becoming one of the world's wealthiest nations by 2000. Also looking into how construction became the most lucrative business in Ireland during this time. Observing, later in this chapter, how the population at the time reacted to the boost in the economy, how wealth changed, and how people's lifestyles were affected. The giving over to capitalism and abandoning any remaining sustainable, circular practices and economy by the country is seen in this chapter. Art during this period will be examined and how it was influenced by the economics of the country will be discussed.

## 2. Mechanics of the Economic Rise

The rise of the Celtic Tiger started back in the 1980s, with Ireland in a deep recession causing interest rates in the country to plummet. While this was a poor time for the economy of the country, the low income rates that came from it played a role in the fast-paced growth in the economy that would follow in the 1990s. Another leading factor influencing the boom's beginning was the exponential gross domestic product (GDP) growth in the country. “[Ireland’s] GDP growth per annum was double or more that of its European neighbours” (Kitchin, *et al.*, 2010). From the early 1990s, these factors of low interest rate and the raised GDP, paired with an increased workforce, up 37.5% from 1996 to 2006 (Central Statistics Office, 2006), both from return migration and immigrants seeking work (Honohan, and Walsh, 2002). This led to consistent population growth, a 16.8% increase from 1996 to 2006

(Central Statistics Office, 2006), and a steady low unemployment rate, which combined and snowballed into what became the Celtic Tiger. The worldwide boom in economy, thanks to the development of the internet, played its part in Ireland's economy at the time too.

The country had a huge growth in technological industries due to its generous corporation tax regime. "Undoubtedly a major factor in [the increased labour productivity - output per worker] was the arrival in Ireland during [1993-2001] of almost 300 new mainly high-tech industrial projects." (FitzGerald, 2007). From 1981, the corporation profits tax was set at a 10% rate for all of the manufacturing industry and only increased by 2.5% in 2003 (Mac Sharry, White, and O'Malley, 2000). The Industrial Development Agencies (IDA) also had a role in attracting foreign direct investment (FDI), like the tech industries, by targeting niche companies, that would work well in Ireland; in expanding industry sectors through their research, this then brings about employment for more of the population and economic benefits for the country (Barry, 2003). All of these factors lined up at just the right moment in time, under just the right circumstances, for the phenomenon that was the Celtic tiger to come about. Some might say it was the luck of the Irish.

### **3. Construction and Property Development in The Boom**

The economic boom led to a surge in construction and development, especially housing units. In the span of ten years, between January 1996 and December 2005, an extraordinary, 553,267 housing units were built according to the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government, DEHLG, now known as the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, DHLGH, (2009) report. The flood of new buildings paired with low interest rates and a significant escalation of bank lending led to a dramatic increase of housing prices. As Kitchin, *et al.* state in their paper *A Haunted Landscape: Housing and Ghost Estates in*

*Post-Celtic Tiger Ireland*, “The average new house price rose from €78,715 in Dublin, and €66,914 for the country as a whole in 1991, to €416,225 in Dublin (a 429% increase) and €322,634 for the country as a whole (382% increase) in 2007.” (Kitchin, *et al.*, 2010). As the price of houses continued rising, so did the amount banks were willing to lend with the collateral it was secured on being repeatedly valued upwards. The rise in housing prices had to go hand in hand with the rise of mortgage loans and, ultimately, mortgage debts. It was a vicious cycle. Due to how well the economy was doing banks were approving loans easily, of higher and higher amounts, mortgages of increased amounts were approved with little regard to how people were going to pay them back, or if they failed not having sufficient collateral to fall back on. Ireland's bank lending grew to 200 percent of national income by 2008 (Kelly, 2009). The increased lending from the banks not only included mortgage lending but also lending to property developers. By 2007 construction accounted for over 13% of all employment in Ireland, nearly 19% when you include those indirectly employed due to construction, and produced 16% of tax revenues (Central Statistics Office, 2008). Banks loaned money to developers for the properties to be built and then lent money to people to buy the buildings. People continuously wanted to develop more and more properties, wanting more and more of the money they saw coming from them. The view of housing was slipping away from that of a place of shelter and a home, losing its connection to people, and becoming a cold commodity. As the years went on individuals saw the profit others had made, who had invested in and/or sold property in the first half of the Boom. This decided it for them, it was seen as a guaranteed good decision, so people across the country would invest and buy new developments before they were completed, this enabled developers to create profit while working and have multiple projects in the works at once. This would also lead to issues down the line for these investors when the crash occurred. While these contractors wanted more of these housing investment properties built, they also wanted them



to be completed in smaller time frames, so they could move on to the next profitable project, and they wanted the cost of construction to be less, leading to corners being cut and ultimately making a loss, or cheating investors, when these poor decisions led to faults that made the properties unliveable and valueless down the line. The *Rose-Coloured Glasses Effect*, which the Cambridge Academic Content Dictionary defines as a way of seeing only the positive and good in the world around you, “fail[ing] to notice negative things, leading to a view of life that is not realistic” (Cambridge University Press, 2009), was in full effect in the country during these years.

#### **4. Cultural Changes during The Boom**

The cultural phenomena of the Celtic tiger, also known as “The Boom”, had a colossal impact on the people of Ireland during its era and long after. Peoples purchasing power was increased during this time, (FitzGerald, 2007), leading to some unwise spending. As seen in the article *Check out these three Irish properties complete with their own swimming pools* in the Irish Independent, Paul Hillis of Poolcourt Engineering Ltd in Wellingtonbridge “admits that many people had pools installed during the Celtic Tiger years” (Gill, 2017). A bit of extra money in the pocket and suddenly you have an indoor swimming pool. Advertising of products was done by parading bikini-clad women up and down Grafton Street, Dublin, during this time of prosperity in Ireland. The Irish photocall model was used to advertise events and products, a marketing ploy in the early noughties (Harrington, 2022).



*Figure 2: Picture by Sasko Lazarov/Photocall Ireland” - Irish Independent, 29 May 2022, Patrice Harrington. “Sara Kavanagh, left, and Karena Graham brave the January weather to mark the launch of the Holiday World Show 2008 at Charlotte Quay Dock, Dublin”.*

They headed the turn of society to a growing commercial culture in Ireland that came about towards the end of the Boom. People were flying to New York to do their Christmas shopping because ‘It worked out cheaper than staying home’, “When shopping at Bloomingdale’s or Macy’s, Irish people can simply show their passport and, as a non-US shopper, the sales tax will be waived” (Cullen, 2006). The Irish people were re-mortgaging their houses and buying holiday homes abroad, as Mark Keenan reports in *Mixed fortunes of global property gamble*, “[In 2006], an assessment by the Revenue Commissioners estimated that by this time, around 200,000 property purchases had been made by Irish buyers abroad.” (Keenan, 2014).

Property investment group, Prestige Group, led the way in informing Irish citizens on ‘the best’ overseas destinations to invest in, creating an International Hotspots Index (Buckley,

2006). It promoted places such as Sofia, Bulgaria, Warsaw, Poland, and Costa de Sol (Buckley, 2006). Everyday consumerism targeted the Irish people through delis<sup>3</sup>. Deli's across the country were being frequented by the building force, starting work at such early times, needing to fuel up their vehicle on the way to work, out of the house before breakfast could be had and so purchasing convenience food from the deli counter. Delis were so full of construction workers every morning and lunchtime to the point that a song about a breakfast roll, *The Jumbo Breakfast Roll* by Pat Shortt, 2006, got to number one in the charts for six weeks and outsold *Hips Don't Lie* by Shakira, by 500 copies, in 2006 ("Retro chart 2006", 2024).

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<sup>3</sup> In Ireland a 'deli' or 'deli counter' is a food counter that serves "food to go" including hot food like chicken filet rolls (breaded chicken on a bread roll), sausage rolls, potato wedges, breakfast rolls (rashers, sausages, eggs, pudding and other hot breakfast items on a bread roll). Deli's also have chilled sections of salads and meats for cold sandwiches and bread rolls that you can have made up for you to go. They are often located in petrol stations. (Devery, 2020) (Brent, 2020)



*Figure 3: Image from Limerick Post article “Limerick activist calls for ban on breakfast roll” Alan Jacques, 11 November 2011. “Popular comedian Pat Shortt, posing as his stage character Sheamie the Builder, scored a big hit with his song ‘The Jumbo Breakfast Roll’.” – Irish Independent, 12 May 2008, Brian McDonald.*

Everyone lost the run of themselves, or at least that’s what the government wanted to portray to evade blame once the downturn in the economy began. As put by Gerard McCann in *The ‘Celtic Tiger’ in Hindsight*, “From 1995 until 2008, in a state with a population of less than 4.5 million, 1.1 million mortgages were approved” (McCann, 2013). The practices of the Irish banks were erratic, and not the fault of the people. People were buying property and building houses with the high percentage mortgages freely given out by the banks, seen in the

Irish Independent article '*I didn't get any handouts from parents*': Taoiseach took out 100pc mortgage just months before crash, "[Leo Varadkar] Availed of one of the 100pc mortgages banks had been offering during Celtic Tiger years" (Larkin and Quinlan, 2018). Taking what was given to them. Surely the banks would not do them wrong and cause problems for them down the line?

During the height of the Boom, 2006, Ireland had more helicopters per head than the UK (*Down to earth with a bump*, 2009). Life in early noughties Ireland was wild. Still today terms stemming from the period of the Celtic tiger are used to describe a certain type of freedom or lavishness when it comes to the spending of money. One of these, popularised by the Irish comedy duo The 2 Johnnies, is "start the mixer", this is a term the duo would use when they speak about encountering highly priced items in their lives or commenting on the effects of inflation on the cost of living in today's society. With cement mixers being on every construction site, it humorously implies that the economy is booming again like during the Celtic tiger, due to the time period's large ties to property development. Owing to the duo's popularity this term has become widespread. The pair also have a parody song titled, *The Boom is Back*, made back in 2017, it comments on the rising prices in the country and the perceived outlandish spending of some people, with the "boom" they mention being the economic boom during the '90s and early noughties in Ireland (The 2 Johnnies, 2017). It has only become more and more relevant in recent years as prices continue to rise.



Figure 4: Image from the album cover of the single 'The Boom Is Back' by The 2 Johnnies, 2017

## 5. Impact on the Arts

The arts were not an outlier in this widespread growth of financial support throughout the country. As Alexandra Slaby puts it, in *Whither Cultural Policy in Post Celtic Tiger Ireland?*, “Cultural provision is one of the areas of Irish life where the benefits of the Celtic Tiger years are the least disputable. Between 1994 and 2008, Arts Council funding rose by 400%.” (Slaby, 2011). During the years of the Celtic Tiger the Arts Council, the Irish Government agency for developing the arts, had a steadily growing figure of revenue with which they provided different sectors of the arts with grants (The Arts Council, 2006). In 2007, peak Boom, the arts council provided over €55 million in grants, an eight percent increase on the figures from 2006 (The Arts Council, 2008). The Abbey Theatre alone got €8.5 million. (The Arts Council, 2008). The socio-economic changes within the country between the years 1994 and 2007 played a massive part in the heightened interest people began to have in the arts. An

increased population of one-person households, more households sans children, and an expanding amount of retired people maintained the possibility of having more free time which may have led these individuals to participate in more events relating to the arts (The Arts Council, 2006). The urbanisation of the outskirts of densely populated areas, bringing more people from further out in, which meant more people were physically closer to venues that held art events, as events were mainly held in big cities and not small towns and villages throughout the country. There was easier access to higher education as a result of the growing income of the public in the country, and more of the population acquiring a higher level of education due to this led to a raised interest in the arts, as shown in previous studies that there is a link between arts engagement and a higher level of education (The Arts Council, 2006). The growing development of technology and internet access led to global advanced accessibility to the arts, Ireland included. In the new age of the internet, where possible, people could access arts online on computers like never before. Of course, there was also the factor of increased income leading to people being able to 'indulge' in the arts, with the high employment rate, fewer people were out of work so had a steady income (Honohan, and Walsh, 2002). People investing in art with the increase of money left after necessities were paid for, and the easily obtained loans, from the bank's generosity (Kelly, 2009). Others wishing to appear of a higher class now that they have a higher income, as it is perceived as upper class and cultured to be interested, involved and invested in the art scene (Dimaggio and Useem, 1978). While this is not the case, it is a hard stereotype to throw considering the history of arts and the continued legacy of arts communities being formed in higher education connections and the lack of larger art scenes in this country leading many artists to move to bigger cities like London, Berlin and New York. This can be viewed as a privilege to be able to move country and pursue a life in the arts.



Flashy art became popular in Ireland during the Celtic Tiger. People began to be drawn to bold colours and shapes, looking for statement pieces to place in their new houses.

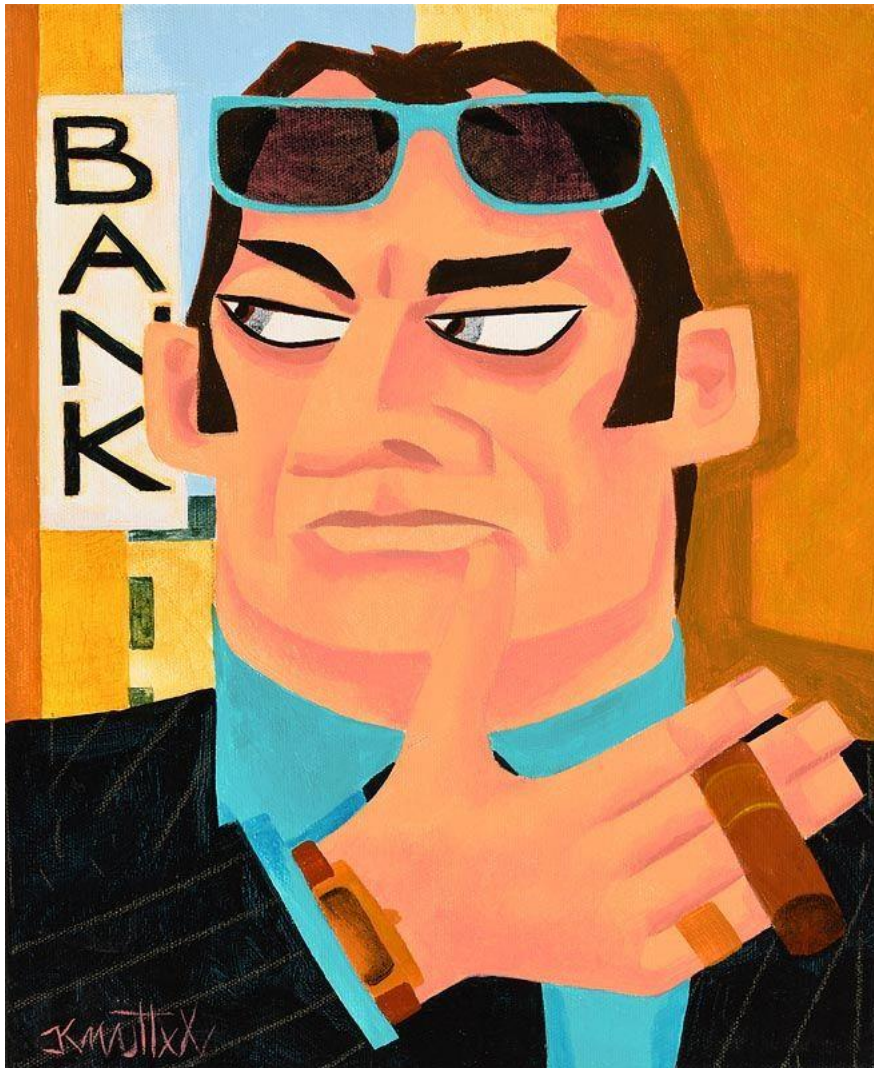


Figure 5: *The Last Supper*, Graham Knuttel.

Graham Knuttel's art is a prime example of this, his eye-catching, colourful works were top market during this time, being sold for thousands. "... [Knuttel's] originals, which at their peak sold for six figures, hung in the homes of luminaries including Sylvester Stallone, Robert De Niro and Frank Sinatra." (Tipton, 2023). A satirical documentary of, as Trevor White, in *Graham Knuttel: 10 things you didn't know about the artist*, puts it "the vanity and villainy of the Celtic Tiger" (White, 2023) was the subject of Knuttel's paintings, so highly



sought after by the very people they were mocking. “Collectors of his work ranged from Bertie Ahern and the Swiss Bank Corporation ...” (Tipton, 2023), with Bertie Ahern being the Taoiseach during the economic crash and banking crisis in Ireland.



*Figure 6: The Banker (2006), Graham Knuttel.*

Knuttel became a celebrity artist, appearing on the Late Late Show, and collaborating with An Post for the Beijing Olympics in 2008 making two postage stamps (White, 2023). He became the face of art in Ireland at the time, the level of popularity seemed fitting for an artist during this time period. His bold style of painting, with seemingly wealthy figures depicted,

becoming popular in a time of bold ways of living and increased wealth draws parallels, evoking thoughts on the age-old debate surrounding whether art imitates life or is life imitating art.

## **6. Conclusion**

This period of recent Irish history, commonly known and referred to as “The Boom”, has been, and will continue to be, studied for years to come for its rapid rise and fall in the economy, its cultural impact, and its lingering effects on the landscape of the country that are still seen and felt decades later. During its time, and long after, the Celtic tiger had an enormous impact on Ireland in all aspects. Through its modifying of the country’s economic framework and the development of the construction industry, but at what cost with the fallout from the methods of poor quality, quick-paced building developed during the Boom, still being seen today. As shown in an RTÉ article, *Number of defects' found at site of Coolock affordable housing project*, Samantha Libreri states a growth in property investors, altering the landscape of the country with its building boom, creating a buy-and-spend happy society solidifying Ireland’s capitalist stance, expanding of the arts council and arts governmental funding, and much more (Libreri, 2025). Through discussing the reactions of the population, regarding their treatment of wealth that came along with the period of economic expansion, alongside the government bodies actions with the country's money, in this chapter, it is clear that this era of Irish history should be used as a helpful guide on what not to do when a country encounters a period of prosperity. With the landscape of the country being pushed to the back of people’s minds during the Celtic Tiger time in favour of financial expansion, it seems fitting that popular art during this period also seemed to lack the ever-present Irish countryside. This era of Irish history will never be forgotten, whether that is for positive or

negative reasons, that is for each individual to decide. Were these high times worth the lows that soon followed?

## **Chapter 2: What goes up, must come down: The Crash**

### **1. Introduction**

What comes after a boom but a bust. This chapter will discuss the fall of the Irish economy in 2007/2008, it will look into the factors which caused this crash, its impact on the country and the reasons it hit the country as hard as it did. How it devastated the country. (Ó'Broin, 2021)

Touching on the Irish banking crisis, the global financial crisis and the tunnel vision on property investment held by the country. Then moving into the property bubbles burst, the chapter will speak on the fall of prices across the country for land and housing. It will define 'ghost estates' and put them into context in the Irish landscape, in terms of where they came from, how many there are, and why they exist. Highlighting the impact they've had on the landscape of rural Ireland. Leading to an investigation of the changes in the Arts Council funding and well-being post-crash. Its falls in funding and cuts in spending that had to be made. The chapter will finish up with a look into artists Brian Maguire, Alice Lyons and Orla McHardy, who have been heavily influenced and inspired by the after effects the economic fall had on Ireland, specifically the property development sector and the unfinished developments left in its collapse.

### **2. Why the Economy Fell**

When climbing high peaks and witnessing the breathtaking views at the top, there's always a fall to face after. Ireland's was in 2007. Beginning in 2006 into 2007 the warning signs of the economy's decline began with unemployment on the rise, almost tripling, and GNP falling by an estimated 17%. The Quarterly Economic Commentary issued by Ireland's Economic and Social Research Institute between 1994 and 2012 reveals the Gross Domestic Product, GDP, growth plummeted from averaging 9% between 1994 and 2000 to -5.5% in 2009 (ESRI,

1994-2012). Ireland became heavily reliant on exports with the domestic demand being next to nothing, exports were accounting for 70% of its GDP by 2013. What happened? How did this happen? The global financial crisis played its part in affecting Ireland at the time, it caused a predicament in the Irish banks, exposing major structural issues and consequential problems with the way the banks look to get control of agency-related costs of disadvantageous selection and moral risk when advancing loans to firms and households (Kitchin, O'Callaghan, Gleeson, 2012). The Irish banks lent heavily to builders and property developers, causing serious losses for them in the crash but they had other troubles too (Kitchin, O'Callaghan, Gleeson, 2012). Also lending substantially to individuals looking to purchase housing, encouraging them to live beyond their means. The use of debt finance secured by collateral is risky in multiple ways but the biggest unreliable factor is the valuation of collateralised assets. This was one of the biggest downfalls for the Irish market, with the method of valuation being a gamble, with poor valuations preceding large scale losses. Collateral-based lending favours investment in property, oversaturating the economy in one type of investment (Mac Bhaird, 2010). There has always been a huge push in Ireland to invest in property, neglecting other areas that could generate wealth, it was encouraged by the government and even rewarded to invest in property (Rae and Van Den Noord, 2006). From government officials to journalists, the view that the population at large were at fault for the economic crash was pushed. Universal blame made the people turn against themselves, holding themselves more accountable than the bankers and financiers of the country (Bradshaw and Ostberg, 2019). As put in *Affect & the Politics of Austerity: An interview exchange with Lauren Berlant*, Lauren Berlant says, "in capitalist logics of [self-discipline], the worker's obligation is to be more rational than the system" (Helms, Vishmidt and Berlant, 2010). The atmosphere of a country falls in times like these, and Ireland was no

exception, the crash of the economy and the following recession hit the population hard. An air of misery and misfortune lingered all over.

### **3. Unfinished Developments and Ghost Estates**

Government bodies and the financial sector held out hope that the housing market would decline at an acceptable pace with the impending recession, but it was so overinflated that there was no way for it to lower with ease, so it all went bust big time. Housing prices fell drastically across the country, this can be seen in *A Haunted Landscape: Housing and Ghost Estates in Post-Celtic Tiger Ireland* when Kitchin, *et al.* say “The Permanent TSB/ESRI Index reported in April 2010 that the average national prices, based on mortgage data, had fallen to the end of April 2002 levels, with a 34% decrease in prices since they peaked in Quarter 4 2006, falling from €311,078 to €204,830 (outside of Dublin from €267,484 to €183,309 (-31.4%); in Dublin from €427,946 to €250,872 (-41.3%)).” (Kitchin, *et al.*, 2010) This was alongside a sizeable fall in land prices. With the sudden loss of financing for projects started on the assumptions of money coming in from other developments just completed, which now either were not getting bought or were getting bought for significantly less than the projected price, a plethora of sites got abandoned. Construction sites left mid-build, from big cities to the countryside, commercial builds, private builds, housing estates, and more, left in various stages of incompleteness. The unfinished developments that were to be housing estates that got abandoned mid-build because of the economic crash in 2007 were nicknamed ‘ghost estates’, for their eerie apocalyptic character, “a ghost estate is generally accepted to be an estate of 10 or more housing units where 50% or more of the units are either vacant or under-construction.” (Kitchin, O’Callaghan and Gleeson, 2012). The large areas of land, ripped up from construction equipment, some with foundations laid, shells of houses, some even with fully complete houses just without water or electricity, some with

those, fully functioning, just in undesirable areas of low employment from the economic crash. Some partially completed estates with a couple of people living in the one or two fully functional builds, living among these empty structures, living on a permanent construction site, with no one around, that was not the home they were sold when originally buying but it's the reality that they had to live in. In October 2011 there was a reported 777 so-called 'ghost estates', these unfinished developments became a visual symbol of the collapse of Ireland's Celtic Tiger economy. A majority of these ghost estates and unfinished developments are in the countryside of Ireland, affecting the beauty of the land and also the condition of the previously healthy, ready-for-agriculture, soil. Rural Ireland suffered in many ways during this recession, this was just one of them. By 2023 there were still 75 ghost estates across the country, while significantly lower than the original numbers, it is still appalling that there are any left 15 years later (Ó'Cionnaith, 2023).

#### **4. Impact on the Arts**

The good times of high and ever-growing funding for the arts during the Celtic tiger years, "Between 1994 and 2008, Arts Council funding rose by 400%." (Slaby, 2011), all came to a swift end after the crash, "In October 2008, it was announced that overall cultural expenditure would be reduced by almost just under 10%, the Arts Councils grant by 12%, and the budget of the national cultural institutions by 20%." (Slaby, 2011). The cuts made to these budgets and the talk of discontinuing entities like the Irish Film Board and Culture Ireland made it feel as if the government was removing culture from public policy, going back on the institutionalized cultural policy made by the Department of Arts, inaugurated by Michael D. Higgins, in 1993. Deciding that culture and art were not important enough to preserve even in tough times. After the preliminary shock in 2008 to the cultural sector, the funding continued to be significantly affected. "Between 2008 and 2013 indeed, the Arts Councils grant-in-aid

fell by 35.2% and total cultural expenditure by the Department of Arts by 26%.” (Slaby, 2011). In Ireland's previous recession during the 1980's the Arts Council's grant-in-aid did not decrease but in fact rose to 5 times its previous level, from £1.2 million in 1977 to £5.9 million in 1986 (The Arts Council, 1977&1986). This showed the level at which the arts were being actively damaged in the recession in the late 2000's. Why was this recession hitting the arts so badly? Was it a worse recession? Or were the arts seen as an easy place to remove funding, viewed as unimportant and an unnecessary luxury that could not now be afforded in the current economic climate? As Paul DiMaggio and Michael Useem state, in their article *Social class and arts consumption: The origins and consequences of class differences in exposure to the arts in America*, “The high arts, including fine art, ... are likely to be heavily consumed by members of the upper-middle and upper class and to be consumed with decreasing frequency as one descends the class hierarchy” (DiMaggio and Useem, 1978). With class and wealth being heavily intertwined, one can also take this to be saying as wealth decreases so does the intake of the arts. The funding cuts in the arts after the Celtic Tiger left thousands of artists to lose out on grants due to funding and ultimately lose jobs and careers.

## **5. Artists Influenced by the Impacts of the Crash**

While this time period heavily affected the funding of the arts, it also led to a new aspect of art creation, with artists looking at the effects of the abrupt economic crash on the building sites across the country. Artists were gaining inspiration from unfinished structures, viewing them as new ruins in the landscape. Of course, they weren't ruins as we know them they were an opposite ruin, new ruins, created the wrong way around yet somehow still evoking the feel of a ruin, capturing its spirit perfectly.





Figure 7: *Contemporary Ruin* (2010), Brian Maguire.

Artists began looking at unfinished construction sites and documenting these modern anti-ruins. One such artist is Brian Maguire with his piece *Contemporary Ruin* (2010), depicting the Anglo Irish Bank project, a prominent ghost ruin situated on the quays of the Liffey in Dublin which remained unfinished until 2016 and is now the headquarters for the Central Bank of Ireland. The painting shows the structure in its incomplete state, unfinished walls revealing cavernous spaces within shrouded in shadow, hallow. The vague outlines of cranes surround the build further portraying the narrative of the building site and just vague enough to give an eerily ghostly atmosphere. The name of this piece challenges the known definition

of what a ruin is. Ruin is often defined in dictionaries as “the remains of something destroyed” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.) and “the physical destruction or disintegration of something” (Oxford English Dictionary, 2024) both speaking of damage happening to something after the fact, adding time to its definition, but with this building Maguire portrays it has yet to be complete in the piece, it is a ruin because it is incomplete, nothing has happened to it, yet, it is just in limbo, abandoned but not aged.

The artists Alice Lyons and Orla McHardy created a piece of work *Developers* (2011-2014), which centered around a ghost estate in Cootehall, County Roscommon. In this area hundreds of holiday homes were built and then stood empty for years after due to the bust in the economy (Lyons, 2020).



Figure 8: *Developers* (2011-2014), Alice Lyons and Orla McHardy.

Lyons and McHardy use the mediums of both poetry and film to capture the feel of the abandoned development. McHardy, a filmmaker and animator, and Lyons, a writer and artist,

produced a 2 screen video and digital animation, installation, and live poetry reading (Lyons, 2020). Responding to the change in the landscape in Cootehall, County Roscommon, and its effects on the people of the town, Alice Lyons states, in the newspaper article, *'Developers' film on Cootehall*, that "Film, speech and poems were employed as tools of reflection, too. This is a display of what they yielded" (*'Developers' film on Cootehall*, 2014). With the video work containing shots of the village in multiple different weathers, close-up and wide shots, closely examining the physical effects on the landscape, the poem captures the voices of the locals, their experience of the change in the village, the impact on the community (Lyons, 2020).

## **6. Conclusion**

This chapter has looked at the statistics and opinions of how the crash became and its reasons for impacting Ireland at such a significant level like the undiversified investing and substantial lending by the Irish banks to property developers whose projects then collapsed due to oversaturation and the global financial crisis. The developers running out of capital to continue projects leaving unfinished construction sites across the country marring the rural landscape of the Irish countryside and creating the uncanny phenomena of ghost estates that still exist almost two decades later. Further, the chapter examined the arts funding in Ireland during this economic downfall, how despite during the previous recession the funding for the arts increased this was certainly not the case for this recession. The funding got cut severely when viewed beside its highs during the Celtic Tiger, having to withhold its spending and having to cut certain grants and limit their expansion. Even though the financial side of the arts was taking a hit at this time, the creative side wasn't. Discussing the artists Brian Maguire, Alice Lyons, and Orla McHardy, this chapter exposes us to the artistic product of the abandoned, unfinished developments across the country due to the downtrodden state of

the economy. How the artist uses the sites as a subject to focus on in their practice, highlighting the changes of the landscape at the time. Drawing attention to the effects of the change on the people of the country, and the impact on the community. This economic crash is still effecting people throughout the country 17 years later and it doesn't seem like that will change anytime soon.

## Chapter 3: Anthony Haughey

### 1. Introduction

Anthony Haughey is an artist who is led creatively by the impact of society and politics on the land and people around it. Looking into the life of Haughey so far, his beginning in art and education around the subject, this chapter will discuss the changes within Haughey's work from pre-Celtic tiger, pieces made during the economic boom, and how they respond culturally. And, his post-Celtic tiger work, after the crash in the economy, will be examined, with a focus on his body of work *Settlement*. Investigating Haughey's underlying themes throughout his practice over the years, his connection to land and place. Exploring the ties between cultural events at the time the pieces were being made and the work produced by Haughey, and how the societal changes around him informed his work. How did the changing political, economic and social climate at the time of creating his works affect his art?

### 2. Background on Artist

Anthony Haughey is a socially engaged artist who focuses on the mediums of photography and videography. Born in 1963, Haughey has been working as an artist and within the art world since 1989. He received a first class honours in BA (Hons) Photography, Film & Video Animation at University for the Creative Arts, Farnham, UK in 1991, an MA in Fine Art (Media) at National College of Art and Design, Dublin in 2001, and a PhD by Prior Publication at University of Ulster in 2009. While working on his art practice he also is a lecturer and PhD supervisor at TU Dublin. Haughey collaborates widely with communities of interest in his practice and co-creates artworks that share a common purpose; to confront inequality and encourage social transformation. (Haughey, 2024). Haughey produced his first photographic series between 1989 and 1990 in Ballymun. The series *Home* follows families

in Ballymun within their places of living, examining to an extent what it was, what the conditions were, that made the group of Irish citizens living here emigrate. The concept for this piece came from Anthony's cousin telling him from as young as fifteen that he would be emigrating, leaving home, and planning his future in America. His cousin and other school friends from Ballymun Senior Comprehensive School knew there was no future for them in Ireland (Haughey, 2024).

### **3. Pre-Celtic Tiger Work**

In 1996, Haughey produced the photographic series *The Edge of Europe*. Looking into the complex relationship between the West of Ireland and Ireland's Diaspora on the East Coast of America. Showcasing the landscape, the people inhabiting it and their communities and culture. "The Western Edge of Europe is a changing world where politics, history and economic hardship have forged the foundations of deeply rooted communities and enriched them with a fluent aural and musical culture. Haughey's focus on the Great Blasket Island and the depopulated landscapes of western Ireland explores links with the past and vestiges of Irish Culture, and he challenges the populist notion of an Irish cultural Disney Land." (Haughey, 2024).



*Figure 9: The Edge of Europe [item 5 of 10], (1996), Anthony Haughey.*

This image from the series shows a body of murky water in its foreground with a rock formation to the left on which a child in shorts is standing facing right. On the right in the body of water is another child sitting on a longboard facing away from the viewer, there are another two people in the water, up to their necks, in the middle of the image behind the rock formation and other children. In the middle of the image the water breaks to greenery across the whole image and just behind you see the roofs of what seem to be a house and sheds. There is also a telephone pole on the right of the image coming up from beside the building roofs, with another two further along in the background of the image and to the left. The telephone poles stick out amongst the natural elements contained in the rest of the photo. They are representative of the spreading connections of phone and internet throughout the

country and globally at this time, with the development of the internet boosting the economy globally too, reaching all areas even rural coastal villages in the west of Ireland. Past the roofs and a small amount of greenery, the background of the image contains the ocean and some islands which break to a white cloudy sky then in the horizon. When having a knowledge of where these photographs were taken and under what context you realise that this view in the background is a nod to what lies beyond the Atlantic, the Americas, and how they are partly a neighbour but a far one that cannot be seen and known of immediately. This body of work would have been made just as the economic boom began in Ireland.

#### **4. Work During The Boom**

In 2006, Haughey published a book containing a body of work, *Disputed Territories*, that he had just finished. *Disputed Territories* focused on several, former, sites of conflict in contemporary Europe, including along the border of Ireland and Northern Ireland, and Bosnia and Kosovo (Dunne 2006). Haughey lived close to the Ireland, Northern Ireland border from the mid 90's, for many years. During this time he became highly interested in the objects around the border that seemed innocent to the untrained eye but held significance in the histories of unrest between nationalists and unionists. This led him to begin the project that spanned a long period of time, *Disputed Territories* (Haughey 2012). One particular image from this body of work is *Shotgun Cartridges, Armagh/Louth Border*. This image contains thousands of shotgun cartridges in bright blues, reds, and whites, all piled in the foreground of the photograph behind what seems like a manmade mound of earth to the left and across to the center of the image. In the background are trees and hills, behind which the image breaks to a cloudy white sky in the top third of the image. The stark contrast between the greens and browns of the earth surrounding the shotgun cartridges and their bright, unnatural, plasticky nature, alongside the mound of earth that seems man-made due to its form being unearthed



dirt with big rocks and stone on top and no plant life growing over it yet, can inform the viewer of a hostile event taking place here. The abandonment of the site lends itself to the time in which it was taken in the late 90s, during which the peace process was occurring, with the Provisional IRA's ceasefire in August 1994 leading to the Good Friday Agreement in April 1998 (IRA, 2024). Leaving these tumultuous times of antagonism behind but not without leaving its mark on the landscape and societal culture in the country.



*Figure 10: Shotgun Cartridges, Armagh/Louth Border, Disputed Territory, (2006), Anthony Haughey.*

## 5. Post-Celtic Tiger Work

In 2011, Anthony Haughey created a body of work centered around the ‘ghost estates’ and abandoned, half-finished, construction sites and structures left around Ireland post-Celtic tiger, this work was called *Settlement*. *Settlement* was made as a response to the ghost estates left behind after the economic crash in Ireland in 2007/2008. During the economic boom in Ireland from 1995 to 2007, often referred to as the Celtic Tiger, there was a huge increase in construction, hundreds of thousands of dwellings were built during this era, and a plethora of construction projects started, like housing estates, and then got abandoned, in what seemed like a split second, when the economy collapsed in 2008, with no budgets left for them.

Image 10 of 15 in *Settlement* sits alongside the 14 other photographs and some videos.

Originally exhibited in The Copper House Gallery in 2011, curated by Leszek Wolnik. “The photographs in *Settlement* are produced in the half-light between sunset and sunrise. The combination of darkness, artificial light and long exposures draws attention to the destruction of the natural environment as a result of over development.” (Wolnik, 2011). When exhibited these photographic images hung, unframed, blown up in various sizes, on plain white walls on all sides of the gallery walls, with a stack of informational posters in the center of the room underneath a clear shelf hung from the ceiling, by wire, with fragments of pyrite on it.

At the time of the exhibition it had been recently found that one of the reasons the foundations on many of those Celtic tiger buildings were having serious structural damage was the hardcore underneath the foundations was made up partially of pyrite, this mineral is also known as fool’s gold, the irony was too strong to ignore. The speed at which all these properties were erected, and the shortcuts taken by the construction workers, caused various problems with the structures later down the line. Problems such as leaks, dampness, sewage problems, and most prominently fire safety defects. “Residents of Priory Hall had to abandon their apartments over fire safety issues. At Longboat Quay they faced huge costs because of

defective fire safety features.”, Kim Bielenberg tells in *Cracking up: the legacy of Celtic Tiger Ireland* (Bielenberg, 2017).



*Figure 11: Settlement [item 10 of 15], (2011), Anthony Haughey.*

This image is broken almost in half between sky and land, with the top half being a light blue sky that is interrupted with streaks of white clouds, including a particularly bright white patch of cloud on the top left. In the foreground at the bottom of the image is flat barren land, ground previously disturbed and just now settling and growing some sparse weeds.

Highlighting the effects these planned estates that got abandoned had on the landscape, years after being discarded and the soil has still not recovered. There is some evidence of tyre tracks left in the ground starting at the bottom middle of the image and heading diagonally

left to the middle ground on a slight incline. In the middle of the image, towards the foreground, there is a puddle of liquid, assumingly water, that is reflecting off the light of the sky, giving it a bright white appearance. This also shows the poor quality the soil has been left in, post desertion at least 3 years on. Behind the puddle to the left are two pieces of pipe, both lying horizontally in a row, proving the speed at which these projects were vacated, with pieces of equipment and materials left behind to rot. Piles of earth and rubble are left to settle. In the middle section of the image, there are three houses in various stages of being built. On the right middle is the shell of a house, with a corner of the building facing us two sides are visible, the first wall on the right seems to be built midway to the second storey, with gaps for two doors and two windows on the ground floor, the start of gaps for four windows upstairs but only halfway up it stops. The second wall goes fully up the two storeys in the middle, with a gap for a window on the ground floor and the second storey, there is also the start of what seems to be a chimney built onto the second wall we see. In the middle center of the photograph is a second incomplete house in the middle ground. This house is more complete than the previous ones with all its walls complete, that we can see, up to the second storey with gaps for windows and a door, but it is still just blocks with no roof. These are prime examples of what was left scattered throughout the country after the economic crash in 2008, they showed these partially built, recklessly abandoned structures. It brought to mind this quote I had read about ghost estates, “The images of clusters of abandoned domestic houses, with wilderness re-staking its claim on ground once zoned for cultivation, and with social depletion recurring through emigration, seem an ironic memorial to history, evoking the so-called “famine cottages” whose ruined remains can still be seen in the west of Ireland.” (Scott, 2017). The absence of people in the image reiterates the sense of displacement these areas give off. On the middle left of the image in the middle ground is the final house, it looks to be a finished house on the outside, two storeys, with a roof, two chimneys, one on

either end, and doors and windows, it also looks to be the same shape as the unfinished house in the middle, reaffirming the fact the image shows an unfinished housing estate. There is also greenery, trees and bushes, in the background behind the house along the middle of the image. This foliage and absence of other structures tell of the location of the photograph being taken in the countryside, a possible expansion of a town into its rural outskirts that has accomplished nothing but contributing to the decline of the countryside.

This specific image from *Settlement* is a good example of the state of these projects at the time due to its visuals. Figure 11 shows three separate houses, all in various stages of completion, from a fully formed house, to a shell of a structure, to just block walls. The natural lighting just before sunrise, twilight, lends to its eerie feel, creating a warm red glow against the structures' block walls, offering a foreboding tone. Trinh T. Minh-ha, a Vietnamese filmmaker and writer, explains their feelings on twilight in a foreword they did for 'Poetics of Relation' by Édouard Glissant, "... twilight, the in-between of endings and beginnings, or of two lights, two worlds, ..." (Minh-ha, 2022), brought to mind by the tone of the image. The practicality of taking the photographs before sunrise and after sunset so as not to be seen or caught on these sites was only one of the reasons Haughey chose this time of day to shoot. Also considering the symbolism behind this lighting and the techniques needed to enhance the images, Haughey chose these hours for their parallels with the abandoned projects; A liminal time of empty quietness, for a space that is unnaturally barren of people and life, in waiting, which draws similarities with Min-ha's writings "... twilight, ... is a becoming-no-thing moment in which the play on the visible and the invisible creates a sense of intense ephemeral reality—or of life as no more no less than an interval between birth and death..." (Minh-ha, 2022). The long exposure used in the photograph, making the image brighter, gives a colder feel with the stark whites in the sky, the cold giving the sense that the

space within the image is empty and that the viewer is alone in witnessing it. It shows the devastating impacts of the failed construction plans due to the economic crash clearly, highlighting their effects on the Irish landscape, and unmistakably demonstrates the reason these botched projects were labelled ghost estates. Frank McDonald, a contributor to The Irish Times and former environment editor, in the article ‘Through a ghostly lens: Artist captures half-built houses’, comments on the techniques used by Haughey in creating these images and their significance in communicating the effects the developments had on the land, “The combination of darkness, artificial light and long exposures draws attention to the destruction of the natural environment as a result of overdevelopment.” (McDonald, 2011).

## 6. Conclusion

The theme of showing care for the land and the people on it has continued to follow Haughey's work to this day. Haughey finished an artist residency, from 2021 to 2024, at The National Museum of Ireland, culminating in the exhibition *we make our own histories* which centered around the question of ‘What does Irish culture and identity look like one hundred years after the formation of the state?’. During this residency Haughey collaborated with over 500 people across Ireland, holding workshops, and making space for dynamic conversations. (Boyle, Cummins, and Haughey, 2024). Anthony Haughey has continually engaged in the effects of societal and cultural change on the landscape and its people. Shown in his work throughout the years, from his first work *Home* to his most recent project *we make our own histories*, and throughout his practice over the years. This chapter examined pieces from various bodies of work created by Haughey throughout his career including *The Edge of Europe*, *Disputed Territories* and *Settlement*. From his pre-Celtic tiger work to his work during the boom, and after the economic crash, Haughey has continually commented through

his art on the effects of the political, societal and economic climates at the time on the people and the landscape.

## Conclusion

The global economic boom, thanks to the development and global spread of the internet, in the mid to late 90s was monetarily positive for Ireland, with an influx of hi-tech computer-based industries coming into the country due to Ireland's generous corporation tax regime. This combined with the low interest rates, high gross domestic product, and consistent population growth produced the Celtic Tiger phenomenon. This period of economic expansion and peak brought about the need for more housing in the country, which sparked the construction industry's surge. The population having an increased amount of capital caused a rise in investment into property, and people's fixation on climbing the property ladder, created a growing need for continuous construction, leading to a property bubble, and altering the landscape of the country forever. The shift in income for the average person brought about lavish spending and purchasing of luxuries not considered an option before, like indoor swimming pools and saunas in the home. Art became more accessible, the economy's rise allowing government funding to increase for the arts and artists like Graham Knuttel began gaining celebrity-like status, having their art bought at high prices by top buyers. Consumerism and capitalism rose to new heights. People hoarded wealth through various mediums, leaving behind the circular practices of repairing and reusing in favour of replacing with a shiny new item. The want for perfection and mass-produced goods rose, leaving behind handmade items, of better quality, that would have unique features due to their form of production. This caused small and local businesses to deteriorate over time and eventually close down. Impacting the rural communities in the country heavily.

Property investment has been pushed in Ireland to an extent that other areas that can generate wealth have been neglected. So when the property bubble burst in the late 2000's the whole



economy came crumbling down with it. The poor structures of the banks were revealed, and their gamble on the poor valuation of collateral lost a lot of money for their patrons, due to their shortcomings. The construction industry counting on future investments to complete current projects halted to a stop with no more investments coming in leaving half-finished projects throughout the country, bringing about the phenomenon of ‘ghost estates’.

Abandoned construction sites, with exposed structural elements and half-built walls, mounds of earth disrupted and land altered indefinitely with no benefit to anyone. Good fertile soil damaged and unusable, large areas of land privately owned sitting unused. As of 2023, 15 years after the crash, 75 ghost estates remain in the country, left dormant, and uninhabitable.

The arts did not escape the crash with funding falling drastically, from 2008 to 2013 the Department of Art's gross cultural expenditure fell by 26% (Slaby, 2011). Artists began to use the outcomes of the crash, the unfinished construction projects, see Figure 6, and ghost estates, see Figures 7 and 11, to create work.

Anthony Haughey's continuous commentary on how political and cultural climates in Ireland, and elsewhere, affect the land and the people who inhabit it through his artwork is shown above. His care for the people and the landscape allows his art to tell the story of what happened and is happening, it brings awareness. Artists continue to comment on the state of housing that's been left impacted by the property bubble burst, see Figure 1, in their work.

Artists are trying to repair their relationships with the landscape of rural Ireland with initiatives like Cow House Studios, which is a family-run artist space in Rathnure, County Wexford. With the accommodation on site being a 300-year-old converted barn and the building in which the studios are being an old cow house used for bedding cattle, “Built in 1915, it was a working “cow house” until 2006.” (O’Gorman and Abruzzese, 2025), the business uses the structures already at hand to promote the production of art. The use of

spaces in the countryside is necessary for artists right now due to the decline in art spaces in cities to practice.

However, housing continues to be a critical issue in Ireland, with a lack of inhabitable houses across the country, increased rules and regulations surrounding planning permissions, foreign investors hoarding property for financial gain and tax breaks (Burke-Kennedy, 2021), and inflated prices of the residential properties that are available (Central Statistics Office, 2024). The number of homeless people in the country reached a devastating 15,000 in the latest reports (Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, 2024), while unfinished, poorly developed, ghost estates remain scattered throughout the countryside. Young people in the country continue to mass emigrate, with little to no hope of ever being able to afford to own a house and have a good quality of life here. This is the legacy left behind by the Celtic tiger.

Throughout the research, writing and editing process of this thesis my own art practice has moulded around my findings and thought process. I am heavily influenced to comment on the forgotten ways of doing and making through my work that seem to have slipped away from us for a plethora of reasons but was exacerbated by the Celtic Tiger era of increased consumerism and fall into indefinite capitalism. Our departure as a society from circular thinking must be reversed to restore the rural communities of Ireland. Particularly focused on the construction side of things in my work, commenting on vernacular building, while also bringing in the angle of consumerism in relation to clothing, how the norm has become quantity over quality can be tied back, in part, to the Boom times. While my view on the Celtic Tiger's effects would lean towards the majority negative, it cannot be said it was all

bad. If for nothing else it did bring about one of the greatest songs of all time “The Jumbo Breakfast Roll” by Pat Shortt.

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