

Oatfield - The Sweet Stuff

Ask anyone who knows anything about Letterkenny in County Donegal and they will mention two things, one that Letterkenny is the fastest growing town in Europe and two, we are home to Oatfield Sweet Factory! Oatfield Sweet Factory itself was 80 years old in 2008 and has been making sweets in the same premises in the centre of Letterkenny since it opened - but Oatfield Sweet Factory are planning to move location and it's definitely the 'end of an era'. As a response, Donegal County Council Cultural Services Section commissioned Oatfield - The Sweet Stuff, a major three fold Public Art Project with Oatfield Sweet Factory.

The project Oatfield - The Sweet Stuff forms part of the Residency Strand of Donegal County Council's Public Art Program and was funded under the Per Cent for Art Scheme arising from the National Road Authority's recent construction of the N56 Mountain Top to Illistrin Road Realignment Project, with additional funds from Zed Candy, the owners of Oatfield Sweet Factory.

The project was presented collaboratively across Donegal County Council Cultural Services; The Public Art Office; The Regional Cultural Centre, Letterkenny; and the County Museum. It is made up three strands, a series of exhibitions celebrating 80 years of The Oatfield Sweet Factory:

1. Oatfield: A Short But Sweet History at the Donegal County Museum on the history of Oatfield sweet factory. This exhibition explored the world of Oatfield confectionary over the last 80 years, through personal memories, photographs and sweet artefacts, going behind the scenes of Oatfield's factory and sees how the much-loved sweets such as Emeralds and Chocolate Caramels are made. There were activities, smells to smell and sweets for children and adults of all ages. Admission was free. The exhibition has proved a reunion for past and current employees of Oatfield, many attending the preview. It has proved hugely popular with school visits and families: the run has been extended for two months to the end of March 2009.

2. The Sweet Fantastic exhibition at the Regional Cultural Centre Letterkenny, was an exhibition adventure was created by Angela Tillges and David Beaupre from the internationally renowned Redmoon Company in Chicago (USA) and students from three Letterkenny primary schools. Through creative writing, art making and performance, the students devised fantastical narratives about Oatfield sweets' mysterious origins and how their ingredients were "captured". These narratives were then developed into six whimsical art works, each one representing a famous Oatfield Sweet. The Education Officer of The Regional Cultural Centre also produced a fun activity trail to accompany the exhibition. Admission was free and the exhibition ran 6th Dec 2008 to 31st Jan 2009. A documentary, Journey Through The Sweet Fantastic, was produced covering the project. It was screened for all the schools involved and at an extra public screening alongside a screening of Charlie and The Chocolate Factory. The documentary DVD is enclosed and will be available to view at <http://www.donegalpublicart.ie/44-publicart.htm>

3. Abigail O'Brien Photographic Residency at the Regional Cultural Centre, Letterkenny was a commission awarded after an open competition process selected the internationally renowned Irish artist Abigail O'Brien. The residency ran in the Oatfield Sweet Factory from October to December 2007. A show of her remarkable photographs taken during the residency will open in November 2009 at the Regional Cultural Centre in Letterkenny, and the exhibition will then tour to Berlin. We will also produce a beautiful colour hard-back coffee table book of the photographs. We are also going to distribute the book through Easons Book Shops with all monies going to The Jack and Jill Children's Charity.

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A series of exhibitions celebrating 80 years of The Oatfield Sweet Factory presented by Donegal County Council's Cultural Services. This project forms part of the Residency Strand of Donegal County Council's Public Art Program and was funded under the Per Cent for Art Scheme arising from the National Road Authority's recent construction of the N56 Mountain Top to Illistrin Road Realignment Project.

