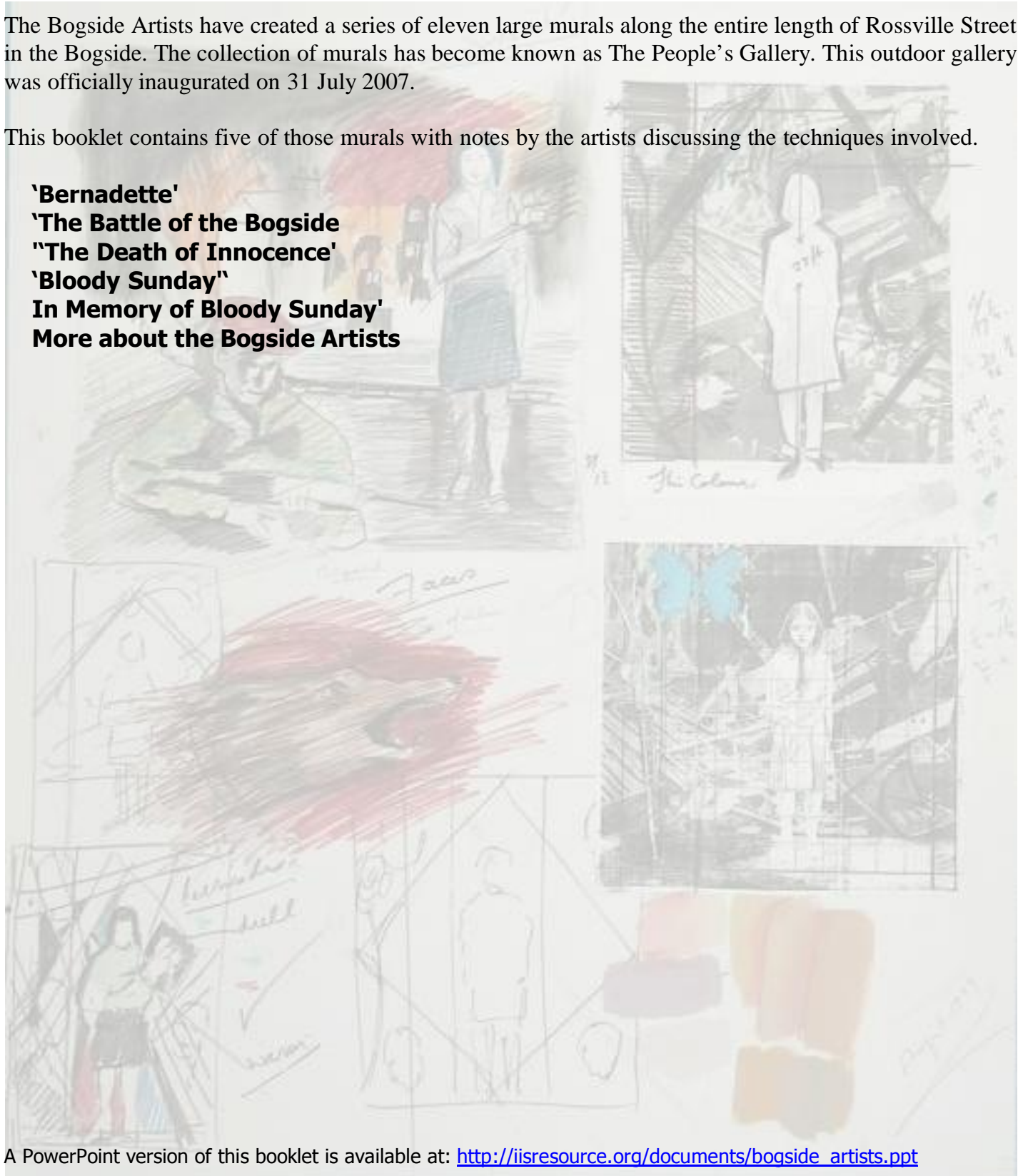


The Bogside Artists have created a series of eleven large murals along the entire length of Rossville Street in the Bogside. The collection of murals has become known as The People's Gallery. This outdoor gallery was officially inaugurated on 31 July 2007.

This booklet contains five of those murals with notes by the artists discussing the techniques involved.

- 'Bernadette'
- 'The Battle of the Bogside'
- 'The Death of Innocence'
- 'Bloody Sunday'
- 'In Memory of Bloody Sunday'
- More about the Bogside Artists



A PowerPoint version of this booklet is available at: http://iisresource.org/documents/bogside_artists.ppt

'Bernadette'

Medium - Acrylics

(Battle of the Bogside, August 1969 - Mural 1)

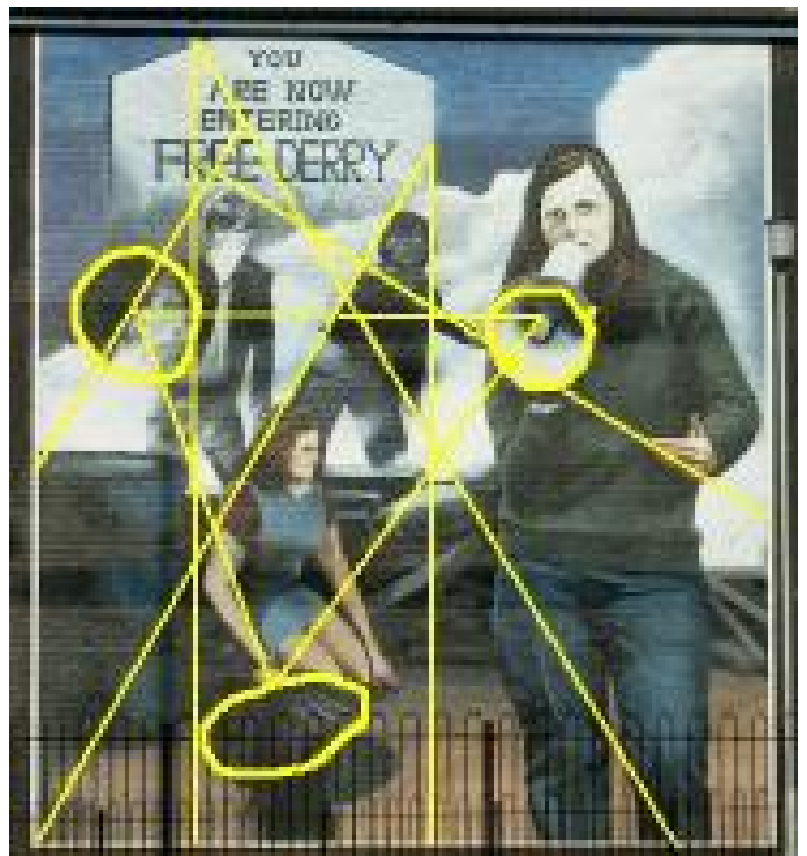
Size - 26ft x 28ft

This is a portrait of Bernadette McAliskey who in the late 1960s, before her marriage, was known to all in the Bogside as Bernadette Devlin. The image depicts a scene from the 'Battle of the Bogside'. Bernadette was a seminal figure in the civil rights campaign. The mural however is a homage to the role played by women in general in the civil rights struggle.

This was the first colour mural we tried although it has to be said we had no colour photographs to work from. And the black and white photos we managed to get were not of the best quality. Both the colour harmonies and the design are kept very tight, the triangle motif being predominant throughout. We were in fact painting the mural with women especially especially in mind; it is a tribute to them.

The photograph on the right is of the original drawing done as a plan of the layout of the mural. The drawing was squared off and scaled up to fit the gable wall.

The construction is based firmly on the triangle first suggested by the apex of the Free Derry gable wall. It is repeated throughout to give stability and harmony to the design. The triangle itself is a potent symbol by itself as it suggests a rising and overcoming. This is echoed in the three circular forms of the bin-lids and the megaphone. At this time the bin-lid was used both as a shield during riots but also by women and children to sound an alarm whenever the security forces entered the Bogside.



'The Battle of the Bogside'

Medium - Emulsion and acrylics

Size - 26ft x 28ft

This was our first mural and thought to be our best. The central figure was based on a photograph taken by Clive Limpkin that appeared on the front cover of a Magazine. Additional photographs and local knowledge supplied the other components of the image. As soon as the painting was completed we knew we had captured something of the spirit of The Bogside. Young people were very much involved in that particular struggle between the RUC, the B-Specials and the campaigners for civil liberties.

The mural was painted in 1994 as commemoration of the 25th anniversary of the Battle of The Bogside in August 1969. It was painted in warm greys and white because we wanted to allude to this image as journalism, as an important event in the recent past. It was painted in emulsions and has survived quite well. The construction is a basic X design with the badge of Ireland a major focal point. The Rossville flats in the background were later demolished as being unfit to live in. The child in the gas-mask is a cousin of two of the artists. Lots of youngsters were caught up in the Troubles at that time. The child gas-mask was an attempt to try and protect against the effects of the CS gas that was used extensively by the security forces in the area. In actual fact these old World War II masks were of little real benefit.



'The Death of Innocence'

Medium - Emulsions and Acrylics

(Annette McGavigan Mural)

Size - 26ft x 28ft

The painting depicts 14-year old Annette McGavigan allegedly caught in cross-fire between IRA and British Army on 7 September 1971. She was the 100th victim of 'the Troubles'. Annette was gathering coloured stones for a school art project at the time.

Our intention for this particular gable wall that faces directly onto the city walls was to do a painting of Operation Motorman which was one of the most virulent incursions by the British Army into the Bogside in 1972. However, given the political situation during 1999 we felt that such an image would be irresponsible. We decided that something more supportive of the peace process that was then in a delicate state would be appropriate. As the issue of disarmament was one of the stumbling blocks to an agreement to form a government we decided we would incorporate this aspect into the work. Our thinking was that all guns are pernicious. Guns exist as a testament to the fact that the basic rule of democracy - 'Live and Let Live' - is not how the world operates.

In these preparatory sketches the aim was to fit the figure of Annette into a context that would define her background and fate. We were anxious to avoid the obvious and banal. This can be seen from our initial consideration to include soldiers in the image. An environment of fire and destruction finally resolved itself to an almost abstract design that depicts the aftermath of an explosion. Thus the image is removed out of the realms of propaganda and into the realm of art and the language of art without losing any of its human content or social contingency.

We wanted the figure to stand out boldly from the background. We also wanted her innocence to radiate against the chaos of the world she was born into. So, we effectively made a shrine for her from the debris resulting from a bomb explosion. We then found a girl to adopt the pose that would define that innocence. Our challenge was - 'How do you take such a heart-rending event as the brutal death of a young girl and make it the vehicle of a plea for peace and sanity?'

The gun which takes up the entire length of the left-hand side of the wall was painted upside down. Like a monstrous serpent it has been defanged; it points nowhere but to the ground and yet is closely enough associated with the main figure as to make the connection all the more moving by being subtle. The work is literary in that sense. That's why we gave it the title it has because the death of this little girl let us know in no uncertain way that in the high places where power is wielded nobody's life amounts to much.

There is also a crucifix in the upper right-hand corner of the mural, this alludes to the resurrection as does the butterfly. The butterfly in fact is left unfinished, purposely so, as it seemed more child-like to us like that. More pertinently perhaps, the peace process had no guarantee it would succeed at that time and our feelings were far from optimistic. The colour of the butterfly is to suggest peace and wisdom. One other interesting thing in this painting is that it was the first time we ever mixed black into our colours for the background. We realised we needed a tonal contrast that would lift the figure out of the wall and this suggested itself to us as the best way to do it.



Susmit



27/13

The Colours

1/2
17/2
23/30
24/21
25/21
26/27
27/21
28/21
29/21
30/21

Pragati Faces



beverage
= dull
✓
= warm



Pragati 1999

'Bloody Sunday'

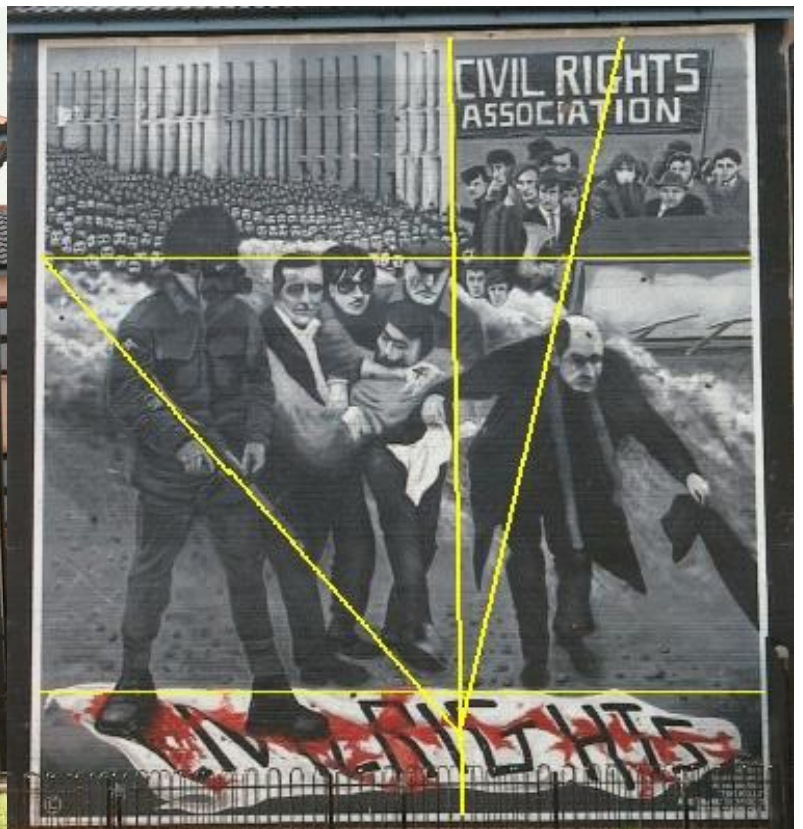
Medium - Emulsions and Acrylics

(Bloody Sunday, 30 January 1972 - Mural 1)

Size - 20ft x 28ft

This mural depicts the death of Jackie Duddy. Fr Edward Daly, later Bishop Daly, and outspoken critic of the Hunger Strikes of 1981, is present waving a white handkerchief. This and the Civil Rights banner are two main focal points, the other being the victim. The soldier stands on the bloodied banner thereby defining his role as seen by the people of the Bogside. Recent evidence of collusion involving the army and the RUC in the deaths of Catholics gives some weight to this view.

The construction lines draw the eye downwards through the supine figure of the victim to the banner. Marching for civil rights is how and why this young man lost his life it says. Again it is painted in black and white and is the result of a photo montage compiled from film footage. The blood stained banner upon which the soldier is standing speaks a great deal for the price people pay everywhere for democratic freedom. In terms of media coverage this mural is second only to 'The Petrol Bomber' as a chronicle of a specific event that had dire repercussions both in the North of Ireland and beyond.



'In Memory of Bloody Sunday'

Medium - Emulsions and acrylics

(Bloody Sunday, 30 January 1972 - Mural 2)

Size - 26ft x 28ft

This mural was painted in October 1997 to commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Bloody Sunday Massacre. We were approached on this occasion by the Bloody Sunday Campaign for Justice committee. No stipulations as to how we would do it were given as it is well understood that The Bogside Artists always paint what they think is appropriate, as any worthwhile artist must.

The design is simple, the circle being the format we agreed on early in the design process as the one that would effectively encapsulate all fourteen portraits of the victims. The portraits were first of all done out on large pages after area calculations had been done on the appropriate size of circle and the total area coverage the faces would occupy if they were to be seen at their best. The faces were then strategically placed and drawn out, the youngest being given special prominence while the older faces surround them hinting at parental concern. The faces of the slain are surrounded by 14 oak leaves, one for each. The oak leaf is the symbol of Derry whose Irish name Doire means Oakgrove.

The colour that is a shade of red proved to be the most precarious part as too loud or too chromatic would have had an effect opposite to what we intended. We wanted a red that was soft and mellow, sad in a word. The painting would be defined by its reference to 'Bloody Sunday'. We believe we achieved just that. In evening light with the sun shining directly on it, it can be unbearably moving.



Three individuals make up the group known as 'The Bogside Artists' - Tom Kelly, Kevin Masson and William Kelly. William's son Paul takes care of video and documentation. The group is famous for their murals in the area of Derry, Northern Ireland, known as Free Derry Corner. These murals depict key events of 'the Troubles' in the city since 1968. The artists have lived in the Bogside most of their lives and have experienced the worst of the conflict. This exhibition of their work is a chronicle of those events that they consider to have been the most significant during the last thirty years. In telling this story they have served a pressing need for their community and Derry people in general to acknowledge with dignity if not pride the price paid by those who became victims of the struggle for democratic rights. Their work therefore is essentially a homage.

As Peter Sheehan, the Vice-Chancellor of the Australian Catholic University in Sydney, so aptly expressed it in his introduction to their recent exhibition: 'The scale of the daily violence experienced by the people of the North of Ireland is not to be assessed just in terms of fatalities and the physical and emotional results of the violence. There is a deeper spiritual dimension that is communicated. I find myself responding most to the overpowering message of the murals: This is our story, where is yours?'

The artists are pledged to continue to express this spiritual dimension on the gable walls of the Bogside. Although they are aware of the parochial nature of the images, they also understand the universal aspect of the conflict. What has happened in Northern Ireland and what has been experienced by the people of Derry is by no means peculiar to either Derry or Northern Ireland.

What confers a unique provenance on our work is the fact that we, both as artists and as citizens, are part of the story we feel obligated to tell. The story of the Bogside is our story and vice versa. Hence our sympathies are with all of the people who have suffered in Northern Ireland whatever their class, creed, politics or belief systems. We believe that only when both communities of Catholics and Protestants have confronted the wounds they have inflicted on each other, and on themselves, can there be the possibility of healing or forgiveness.

To tell it like it is and was is vital to this catharsis. Our murals stand therefore as the not too silent witnesses to the colossal price paid in suffering and brutalisation by a hopelessly innocent people in their struggle for basic human rights. The institutionalisation of sectarian exclusivity is the very essence of the conflict. It is a crime against both Catholics and Protestants. Our fervent wish is that the peace process will give us time to put right what has been so drastically put wrong. To this end we devote our craft and our energy, our imagination, our story and our hope.