

NCFA local election campaign : €1 per week, per person from local government, by 2019 – matching state funding now, in 2014.

**Towards a Republic of Culture 2016
If there is ever to be circus, there must first be bread**

In a society that fundamentally lost its way, and where a new sense of identity must be created to carry is forward, making a **Republic of Culture** is the challenge set by the National Campaign for the Arts (NCFA).

In a country where so much let us down, the arts uniquely can reimage and articulate the functioning, self-critical but also confident society we need. When one after another pillars of power - politics, media, and business - sank in a self-satisfying group-think, it was artists who persistently questioned values that were almost universal before they were found to be baseless.

In this decade of commemoration, it is in the imagination and through the arts, that we can best find again a sense of authentic identity both nationally and for local communities. That is the ambitious, change-making agenda NCFA are embarked upon.

In the context of local and European elections on 23 May we are issuing a challenge to candidates.

NCFA is calling on Council candidates, if elected, to commit to matching by 2019 (effectively a 2020 plan) local government spending on the arts, with current central government spending now. The state spends 98c per person per week in 2014. We ask that newly elected Councils over the life of their mandate commit to spending €1 per person, per week by 2019, for 2020.

Coming from an average spend of 13c per person per week now, this is vaultingly ambitious. For that we make no apologies. In places in Ireland like Galway and Kilkenny where locally there is a great appreciation of the arts, there is enormous reward in energy, capacity, and international identity.

There is economic reward too, but this needs to be understood in context. It is while very important also secondary. It is secondary because creativity is never an economic programme. It is individuals and communities speaking authentically, in creative ways that first draw attention and amazement. Then in tandem, comes economic opportunity. One of the most pernicious undermining of the arts, is a persistent attempt to suborn it to the maw of an exclusively economic analysis.

In a state with no policy whatever for the arts, there is none the less a persistent attitude. The arts are there to be a chorus and a red carpet for power and powerful people; lauded on big days and then summarily forgotten, No! The arts are there as an essential imaginative, emotional and intellectual outlet for all our people. Niggardly tokenism, the absence of policy, and occasional patronising attention are not support. It another failure of imagination in a state, where so much else failed as well.

If the challenge set out by NCFA is to political power, it is also a challenge to artists and arts organisations. There is a growing disconnect between the passion of the arts 'on-stage' and an increasingly discernible cowering, for crumbs. As funding has reduced, critical engagement has wilted. This is understandable. Artists are overwhelmingly people on the economic margins. If there is ever to be circus, there must first be bread.

NCFA plan to campaign to break through the interconnected attitudes of tokenism from power and deference towards it. The funding pledge, we ask for, is one that when realised will animate local communities and enable artists. It will enable them to do their work, and to live with the reasonable expectation of at least some basic and essential funding. Most importantly it is one step, in a series, that together can reimagine Ireland as a Republic of Culture in 2016 and beyond.