



Art Basel in  
Miami Beach, 2016

*What was your background before opening your gallery in Dublin in 2006? And how would you describe the art scene in Ireland during the 1990s and 2000s?*

I originally trained as an artist and practiced in installation and video until I opened the gallery. I believe the laterality of continuing to think like an artist brings a creative and fearless freshness to being a gallerist. I also have a Master's in curatorial practice and was involved with academia for a number of years. Prior to opening the gallery I was co-coordinating a masters course that combined practice, curating, and critical discourse. A sub-text of which was to encourage creative and entrepreneurial risk-taking in the Irish art scene, yet all the good domestic talent appeared to be endlessly pulled away, as ever, by an "international" undertow. This is a long-standing issue in Ireland, so it seemed like an appropriate counter-balance to put my teaching into practice.

To understand the visual art scene in Ireland a couple of things have to be considered. Although it is a country that has inherent creativity in so many ways—remarkable levels of education, use of language, and fantastic humor—the greater culture has long identified with literature, theater, and music over the visual arts, so the inheritance of contemporary visual culture remains substantially underground to mainstream perception. It is my theory that neutrality during World War II, along with centuries of colonial occupation, kept modernism (in terms of visual art and design) from substantively impacting our island. Over and above this, I am not the most qualified commentator, as like so many of Ireland's diaspora, I spent much of my 20s and 30s living and working in different parts of the world, which has inevitably contributed to my internationalist vision of mother's tankstation limited. A world gallery, that happens to be located in Dublin.



*Can you expand on why you decided to open the gallery? How did you choose its name?*

mother's tankstation opened with a show by Nina Canell, *We woke up with energy*, when she was six months out of college. For me that sort of says it all ... Feeling completely inspired by a visit to LISTE and Art Basel in 2005, I just wanted to physically throw my energies into something vibrant, positive, alive. Nina, studying in Ireland, was evidently a brilliant student and I wanted to be part of unfurling that revelation to an international audience. It felt great. We applied to LISTE when we were three weeks old and were fortunate to be immediately welcomed by the team.

We are so frequently asked about the gallery's name that it's good to put it on record. "Tankstation" is drawn from an arc of large iron letters on a (now-defunct) warehouse building in the Guinness brewery complex that dominated the view out of our back office window. We simply married this to the name of a singular New Orleans diner "Mother's," which during the 1926 depression would carve roasts for their affluent customers, while catching the falling scraps and juices ("debris") to serve on bread rolls for a nickel to those down on their luck. Mass feeding. The conflation of two distinct ideas seemed, abstractly, to conjure images of nurture, protection, and space for growth. It works linguistically on an intuitive level; people seem fascinated by it and it was also important to pull it away from eponymous naming, to focus on the art, the artists, and the building.

*Your location is quite unique. Do the artists react to it when conceiving an exhibition?*

Ireland is a beautiful country and Dublin a classic city, but we are irrefutably on a periphery, both as a country and as a gallery located on the old edge of an old city. Fortunately it is a place that people love if they are familiar with it, or dream of loving if they are not. The space is special, not enormous, nor a conventional "white cube," but a converted former sausage factory, an old family brand that is very "Dublin." The building has a good amount of social space alongside the public gallery, a homely mezzanine for gallery dinners and for hosting artists, and a super library/office with a view that overlooks the Guinness empire and out into the distance to the Phoenix Park and the Wellington Monument. We are fortunate that artists make special shows for us that often embrace both the spirit and architecture of the gallery.

*In Art Basel in Hong Kong you are a member of the Discoveries and Insights selection committee. It's a perfect position from which to observe the Asia-Pacific scene and the evolution of Art Basel in Hong Kong.*

We now have quite a long, firm relationship with Hong Kong, participating in ART HK for a few years prior to its relationship with Art Basel. I am proud to be involved as a sector expert for Art Basel in Hong Kong. It's a role I love. Practically, the involvement with Hong Kong also ties Dublin to my formative years in Australia where I studied under the sadly missed Nick Waterlow. Hong Kong is a perfect meeting point for much of the world, pretty equidistant to many places. We now work with a number of artists from the Asia Pacific region and intend more active engagement.

**I believe the laterality of continuing to think like an artist brings a creative and fearless freshness to being a gallerist.  
—Finola Jones**

*You also publish books and an annual magazine, mother's annual. Could you tell us more about this editorial policy?*

From the first steps of the gallery we have taken text seriously; it plays a crucial supporting and discursive role, both in making things happen and then in negotiating their often complex meanings to the widest possible audiences in the clearest terms. Both the original and new websites were and are fronted by a manifesto. Also we have always sought out promising young writers, and have commissioned critical texts on every single show, where young writers work together with an experienced editor. It's a process that allows everybody to learn and grow. Not only have some fabulous writers emerged, but the theory behind editorial strategy was to partially circumnavigate the limited discursive environment traditional to the Irish visual arts. Putting on a show of international significance in a quiet environment means that a critical record of the project must be assured. The *mother's annual* publication has been our long-term strategic solution to this. The physical form of the annual is taken from the tradition of children's literature, comics, and serial satirical publications; overall it is building into a collective record of the gallery's history of which we are enormously proud.