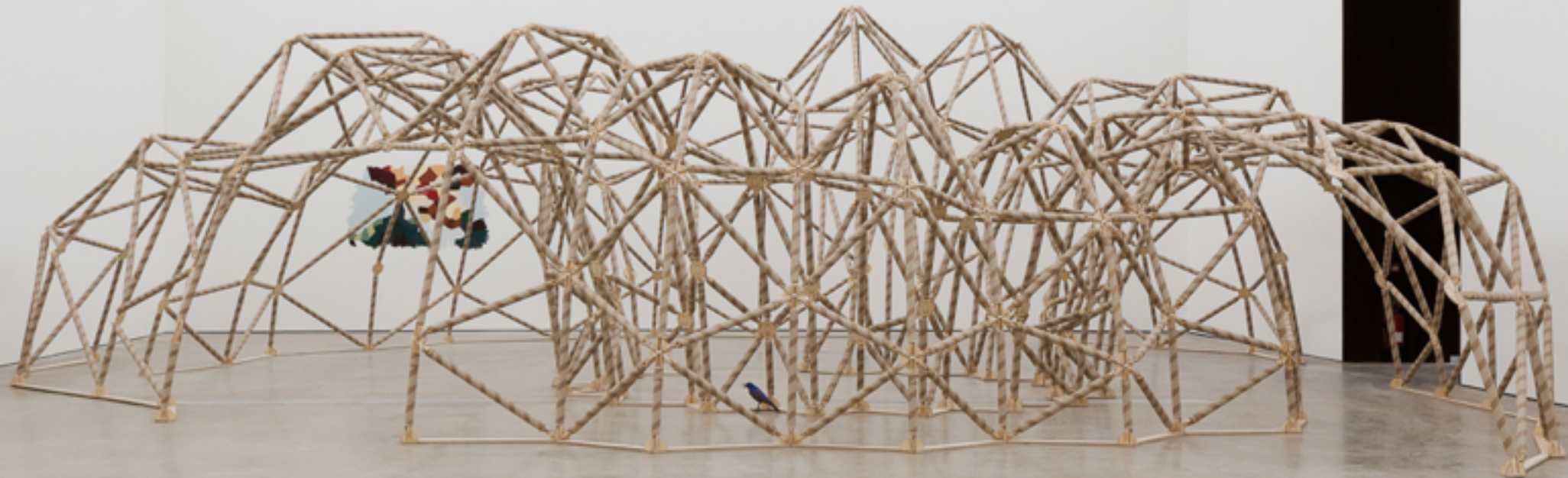


VISUAL

Centre for
Contemporary Art
and the George
Bernard Shaw Theatre

Strategic Plan 2017 - 2021



Context

VISUAL is one of Ireland's leading contemporary art spaces. We work with partners, stakeholders and communities to realize the transformative benefits of the arts to society.

History

VISUAL is a project of Carlow Arts Centre Ltd., a company under the ownership of Carlow County Council. This €18 million development is a joint project of the Carlow Local Authorities, made possible through the allocation of funding by the Local Authorities and a grant of €3.17 million by the Department of Arts, Sport & Tourism under the ACCESS Programme. A site was generously donated by Carlow College and an international architectural competition was held by the RIAI, with the final award of contract to Terry Pawson, a British architect with vast experience in designing buildings for the arts and cultural sectors. The Centre opened in 2009. It houses a 335-seat theatre and the largest white-cube gallery space in the country - a massive 12 metres high - where it produces a programme of both commissioned and existing high-quality national and international contemporary art, plus a host of performances and events in multiple disciplines, including theatre, dance, film, comedy, literature and music.

Some facts and figures:

VISUAL 2016 - 65,717 visitors

- Gallery visitors have increased by **67%** since 2013.
- Over the past three years, theatre attendance has grown by **25%**, VISUAL's share of Box Office income has grown by **58%** and bar income has grown by **13%**.
- Over the past three years, our Annual Programme funding from the Arts Council has increased by **82%**.
- Over the past three years we have developed arts engagement programmes around design thinking, augmented reality, architecture, urban planning, social enterprise and digital technology with multiple partners across enterprise development and education.

Between Feb-May 2017, we have welcomed over 2000 schoolchildren into VISUAL to explore our current exhibition season.



Our Mission

We enrich, inspire and improve the everyday through art

Our Vision

An international hub for realising the value of contemporary arts practice

Our Values

Inclusion

Excellence

Creativity

Collaboration

Ethics



Key Themes

Three key areas have been identified as the drivers of our strategic development over the next five years. They are our artistic programming, our development of value through our activities, and our long-term sustainability. These themes form our strategic objectives for 2017 - 2021 and are broken down into nine individual goals in the following ways:

- through a focus on people, recognising that our many audiences, communities and stakeholders are of central importance to what we do, and that the expertise of our team and Board are essential for successful delivery.
- through a focus on the institution as a generative hub, driving innovative and collaborative explorations of the wider value of creativity and the arts.
- through a focus on processes, and ensuring the artistic and operational success of the organisation through excellence, expertise and collaboration.

Objectives 2017-2021

1. Develop our audiences through inspiring, innovative and relevant artistic and engagement programmes based on excellence
2. Create value with and for our many communities of interest through realising the transformative benefits of the arts
3. Contribute meaningfully to and develop the long term sustainability of the cultural sector, including VISUAL



Objective 1

Develop our audiences through inspiring, innovative and relevant artistic and engagement programmes based on excellence

VISUAL gives access to challenging and excellent contemporary art practice in a context that explores the value, richness and relevance of the arts in our lives. We are committed to providing meaningful access to and advocacy for, contemporary artistic practice of the highest quality through our exhibitions, events and activities. Our unique scale and regional location within the allows for ambitious programming and wide-reaching engagement opportunities with diverse audiences – local, national and international, online and in person. Our theatre space is a focal point for rich local engagement and offers access into creative and artistic activity.

1.1 Continue to grow and develop inclusive audiences for the arts

- Identify and remove physical, social and economic barriers to accessing VISUAL and support, foster and provide opportunities for arts participation for our communities and schools.
- Develop targeted strategies to maintain and grow current audiences and develop new ones, and monitor, evaluate and improve visitors experience.
- Build and engage a strong network of local and regional visual arts and theatre practitioners, both amateur and professional.

1.2 Programme for excellence

- Maintain the integrity of the programme with visual arts as the central medium and theatre as a valued route into arts engagement, creative self expression and social cohesion.
- Develop, maintain and enhance an artistic programming policy across visual arts and theatre.
- Position engagement as a core programme activity and build relevance and active participation through thematic and cross-disciplinary approaches and artistic decision-making.

1.3 Collaborate nationally and internationally

- Seek national/international partners that will support ambitious and innovative programming, exhibition development and touring potential.
- Investigate international funding opportunities.
- Grow international awareness of VISUAL through engagement in the contemporary arts sector and targeted communications strategy.



Objective 2

Create value with and for our many communities of interest through realising the transformative benefits of the arts

We passionately believe that the arts have a vital role to play in the cultural, social and economic development of the region, and that access to meaningful engagement with the arts fosters the development of self-esteem, well-being, self-expression, social inclusion, creativity and enterprise, both in individuals and in societies. VISUAL has enormous potential to create and generate value, as a spur for the development of social and economic benefits and as a hub of creativity and innovation within the region.

2.1 Inspire wider understanding

- Effectively communicate to stakeholders the outcomes and value that VISUAL delivers to the region.
- Articulate the strategic and developmental potential of VISUAL to local, regional and national development bodies across education, community and economic development sectors.
- Continue to develop our critical reputation through communication of programme excellence.

2.2 Build valuable partnerships

- Clearly align the strategic development of VISUAL with local, regional and national development plans.
- Develop VISUAL's capacity to connect to enterprise, science, technology, engineering and design as key strengths in the region.
- Work with Tourism partners to position VISUAL as a key cultural attraction in the region.

2.3 Deliver new value

- Collaborate with the 3rd level sector and research bodies to devise and find funding for projects that generate new knowledge.
- Collaborate with community and education partners to devise and deliver projects/programmes that increase social capital such as social inclusion, identity, efficacy, leadership, esteem and well-being.
- Collaborate with education and development bodies to devise and deliver projects/programmes that develop creativity, innovation and enterprise in target audiences.



Objective 3

Contribute meaningfully to and develop the long term sustainability of the cultural sector, including VISUAL

VISUAL is a key cultural asset in Ireland and the largest arts institution in the region. We recognise the importance of applying the highest standards of ethical management and stewardship in sustaining and safeguarding VISUAL on behalf of the people of Carlow. Our long-term sustainability is inextricably linked to the development of a thriving arts sector, creating the artists and audiences of the future.

3.1 Grow the potential

- Maintain and further develop leadership and expertise at Board level to drive implementation of the Strategic plan.
- maintain and further develop the expertise of the VISUAL team and support delivery of the Strategic Plan through adequate resourcing and investment
- Contribute to the sustainable development of artistic practice in visual arts and theatre in the region.

3.2 Sustain our activities

- Maintain, develop and enhance VISUAL's high standard of ethics in governance, stewardship and financial management.
- Implement a financial model that recognises the requirement to develop diverse income streams and maintain profitability, and utilise commercially successful events to sustain artistic activity.
- Work with Carlow County Council as our primary stakeholder to safeguard the public investment in VISUAL.

3.3 Create the future

- Champion the value of the arts to society.
- Develop the narrative of Carlow as a hub for creativity and innovation.
- Position ourselves as one of Ireland's leading contemporary arts centres and develop our authority and voice in the sector.

Strategic Objectives and goals 2017-2021:

	<i>people</i>	<i>processes</i>	<i>potential</i>
1. Develop our audiences through inspiring, innovative and relevant artistic and engagements programme based on excellence	1.1 Grow inclusive audiences <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foster inclusive access • Maintain and further develop audiences • Engage practitioners 	1.2 Programme for excellence <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lead programming through Visual arts • Develop and maintain Artistic Programming Policies • Build engagement through artistic decision making 	1.3 Engage Internationally <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek national/international partners • Investigate international funding opportunities • Grow international awareness
2. Create value with and for our many communities of interest through realising the transformative benefits of the arts	2. 1 Inspire wider understanding <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate value to stakeholders • Communicate development potential • Build critical reputation 	2.2 Build valuable partnerships <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Align with wider development and arts plans • Connect with STEM as a key regional strength • Work with tourism partners 	2.3 Deliver new value <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generate new knowledge through research • Develop social capital • Develop creativity and innovation
3. Contribute meaningfully to and develop the long term sustainability of the sector, including VISUAL	3.1 Grow the potential <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain and develop leadership and expertise at Board level • Maintain and develop leadership and expertise in the VISUAL team • Support and sustain artistic practice 	3.2 Sustain our activities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain and enhance ethical governance • Implement an appropriate financial model and sustain artistic activity through commercial activity • Safeguard the public investment 	3.3 Create the future <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Champion the value of the arts • Develop Carlow narrative • Position VISUAL as a centre of national importance

