

# Arts & Books

# Arts & Books

## Not waving but sinking – in a deluge of pomp and ceremony

**BERNICE HARRISON**  
TV REVIEW

MEMORIES OF LAST weekend's Late Late 50th Anniversary Special (RTÉ One) prevented this column taking quite so much pleasure in the bags the BBC made of Queen Elizabeth's jubilee coverage. Someone decided that the showpiece event, the Diamond Jubilee Thames Pageant (BBC One, Sunday), would be much better if celebrities were dotted at random around the flotilla, so Maureen Lipman was peering out from a barge, Richard E Grant was on a bridge talking about underpants and Clare Balding was trying to get a rowing crew to say something interesting.



It rained on one's parade: Queen Elizabeth with Prince Harry and the duke and duchess of Cambridge on her jubilee barge

And the commentary, which laid on the hyperbole (inevitably, I suppose), talked up how happy the queen looked (which she didn't) and how much she was enjoying herself (she looked bored), even though no sensible person could be having a good time bobbing around in a boat in a downpour.

And you couldn't hear the music or even see much of the boats, what with the cutting back and forth between wittering celebs. But the real problem that's exercising them over in Blighty is the BBC presenters and their lapses in gravitas. Culled from the more excitable youth wing of the broadcaster, they frequently didn't quite know who they were (though with all those stoney gold epaulettes and people dressed like soldiers, who could blame them?) and kept doing fantastically inappropriate things. Fearnie Cotton and Paloma Faith discussed the jubilee memorabilia and how useful the sick bag with the queen's face on it might be.

BEACHED ON the sofa for a rainy weekend, watching the jubilee coverage because nothing much else was on, there should have been some pleasure in seeing that the Beeb can get it wrong – that's if I hadn't been wondering whether scrubbing my eyeballs with a Brillo pad might remove the images plastered there by the anniversary Late Late.

If you've managed to forget Sinéad O'Connor's creepy story about the first time she met Gay Byrne, Dustin's offensive and unfunny quip about three men and a bike, Liam Neeson's incoherence or the rest of the boring drivel good for you. As the night dragged on even Ryan Tubridy had the look of a man who might at any moment clutch his head and do a passable impersonation of the man who didn't they make it shorter? The first 40 minutes, when Gay Byrne and Pat Kenny were on gassing with Tubridy, was entertaining; the rest felt like more proof that *The Late Late Show* has run its course.

**Get stuck into . . .**  
**Dead Boss** (BBC3, Thursday) is a new murder/mystery/comedy series written by the brilliant Sharon Horgan (right), who plays a woman imprisoned for killing her boss, Jennifer Saunders costars.

**Torch Relay** (RTÉ One, Wednesday), which followed the flame as it went through the city. Anchoring the programme from the studio, she interviewed her panel of Olympic athletes, Paul Hession and Olive Loughmane, with an engaging ease, flipped back and forth between the action outside, introduced archive footage (including Ronnie Delany's epic win in 1956) and dished out Olympic facts. There was never any doubt that if anything went horribly wrong, and someone legged it with the torch, she'd lose the smile, whip back into her trusted-newsreader persona and carry on.

**TO BE FAIR** to the BBC and its jubilee coverage, filling airtime on unscripted big occasions is tricky. But it is possible, just look at how adept Eileen Dunne was throughout the three-plus hours of the RTÉ News Special. Olympic

## On the road to nowhere – and Poland

**MICK HEANEY**  
RADIO REVIEW

AS THE RESIGNATION and apathy of the fiscal treaty was campaign suggested, our attitude to Europe has become increasingly weary, if not cynical. But even the most ardent Europhile must have been slightly alarmed at the symbolism of the German ambassador appearing on RTÉ the day after the referendum was passed to give his country's verdict on the result.

Admittedly, when De Ederhard Lubkemeier spoke to George Lee on *The Business* (RTÉ Radio 1, Saturday), he came across as an impeccably mannered diplomat rather than an all-powerful plenipotentiary passing judgment on a vassal state, but it was still clear which country was the supplicant. When Lee asked what the German reaction to the Yes vote was, the ambassador immediately replied "relief". But when it came to relieving Ireland's fiscal woes, Lubkemeier offered little reassurance.

appreciate this", the impression was of a wealthy Teutonic uncle giving his ragamuffin Celtic relatives a pat on the head before patronising them along. It was a patronising remark picked up by Paul Sweeney, chief economist with the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, when he said that "we made a terrible mistake in socialising bank debts, and of course the beneficiaries of that are the German banks, so no wonder he [the ambassador] respects that".

Least we were left with any lingering traces of optimism after that exchange. Lee spoke to the Nobel-winning economist Paul Krugman, whose jauntily mannered belief his deep gloom for the future. On the referendum outcome he was unequivocal: "The fiscal thing is a bad idea, and one shouldn't vote for a bad idea". Far from requiring more austerity, Europe needed to spend to kickstart the economy, as our example proved: "Ireland has been such a good soldier and done everything it's supposed to do, and austerity still hasn't worked."

**Having spoken from Dunkirk, John Murray drove 1,000km to broadcast from Berlin the next day** and done everything it's supposed to do, and austerity still hasn't worked."

**Radio moment of the week**  
It was hard to know whether to laugh or cry when the Independent TD Mick Wallace, a loud voice for equality and fairness, went on Thursday's *Morning Ireland* (RTÉ Radio 1, weekdays) to explain why his construction company underpaid VAT, resulting in a €2.1 million settlement with the taxman. "I acknowledge that what I did was wrong, but I did it in good faith," he said. "Even though it was illegal, I thought it was the right thing to do." Wallace was candid as ever. But for his honest image took a knock.

# Get art in that garden

**GEMMA TIPTON**  
Recent installations at Bloom and Chelsea show how well art works outside the white cube of the gallery. So are gardens art? And can a forest walk become an outdoor gallery?

**TO VISIT TO BLOOM** or to the Chelsea Flower Show – in which, for just a few days, gardens appear fully formed – demonstrates the artifice of gardening. Using nature as a medium, designers create places and spaces out of nothing. The descriptions of many of the gardens imply that they also mean something. The World Vision Garden, for which John Warland and Sim Fleming won a silver medal at Chelsea, symbolises "how World Vision's work with children also helps families, communities and, ultimately, entire countries."



ABOVE Irish Sky Garden by James Turrell at Liss Ard Estate, Co Cork

## Cuts and a clueless power

**FINTAN O'TOOLE**  
CULTURE SHOCK  
IT IS TEMPTING to say that the current Government is the most philistine in the history of the State. But that would be a wild exaggeration. It is merely the most philistine since the end of the second world war. For 50 years it could be said that, even when official cultural policy was negligible, it was not actively hostile. This claim would be hard to make now.

**ART REVIEW**  
Arts&Books, page 11

**SOLDIER OF THE CANVAS:** John Banville on conversations with Louis le Brocqy and other artists



**At its best, sculpture in outdoor settings, and not simply large public pieces on motorways, roundabouts and in civic spaces, benefits from being freed from the confines of the art gallery**

spaces, benefits from being freed from the sometimes stultifying confines of the art gallery or museum. In his groundbreaking study of art galleries, *Inside the White Cube*, Brian O'Doherty writes about the way in which "the ideal gallery subtracts from the artwork all cues that interfere with the fact that it is 'art'. The work is isolated from everything that would detract from its own evaluation of itself."

## Greats outdoors Where to soak up sculpture

**ARTISTS' GARDENS**  
Gardens created by artists can be the perfect combination of nature and vision. **Claude Monet** created the gardens at Giverny that then inspired some of his most beloved paintings. **Derek Jarman's** garden at Dungeness in Kent is a bleak beauty in the shadow of a nuclear power plant. **Barbara Hepworth's** garden at St Ives contains many of her sculptures and is in the care of the Tate.

the white walls of an art gallery, and far less forgiving of art that doesn't come up to standard. So what happens to sculpture when it gets down off the plinth? Against the riot of colours and forms that nature can come up with, the merely decorative is often not enough. At *Oak*, which runs at Killenure Castle in Co Tipperary until the end of June (killenure.com), Aoife Barrett's *Favela* is a series of wooden dwellings that appear to have been made for fairytale-scale slum dwellers. They are made stranger still by their woodland setting.



ABOVE Learning to be I by Antony Gormley at Lismore. Photograph: Andrew Lawson



LEFT Nestled by Tony O'Malley at Oak, Killenure Castle



RIGHT Square with Two Circles by Barbara Hepworth at the Yorkshire Sculpture Garden. Photograph: Jorj Wilde



BELOW Sky Train by Michael Bulfin and 60 Degrees by Kevin O'Dwyer, both part of Sculpture in the Parklands at Lough Boora



BOTTOM Decet #2 by Steven Aylin at Oak

is the Catalan artist Joan Miró, whose work is on show at the Yorkshire Sculpture Park (esp.co.uk) until January. Menacing the very English landscape with their wild surrealism, Miró's works fit in with the park's other pieces, which include works by Alec Finlay, Andy Goldsworthy, Anthony Caro, David Nash, Sophie Ryder and Henry Moore. The gardens at Lismore Castle in Co Waterford (lismorecastlegardens.com), which are open from May to September, have works by artists including Eilis O'Connell and Antony Gormley, and this year there are also sculptures by Hans Josephson. At Liss Ard in Co Cork (lissardestate.com) the Irish Sky Garden by James Turrell, one of a series of works the artist made around the world, frames views of the sky, concentrating the visitor's understanding and experience of what often passes unnoticed above our heads. Like the sky gardens, the best of outdoor art is often made in the landscape, rather than being imported into it. *Sculpture in the Parklands* at Lough Boora in Co Offaly (sculptureintheparklands.com) showcases art made during residencies in the workshops of this former Bord na Móna cutaway bog. Artists include Alan Counihan, Martina Galvin, Kevin O'Dwyer, Julian Wild and John Sietzema. It is one of the art treasures of Ireland, well worth a visit at any time of the year.

Putting art in a gallery asks us to look at it in a different way: as an idea, a comment, a piece of history and a commodity. Put it outside and it can seem an intrusion into an already beautiful setting, but at its best, and freed from the often overbearing energy of those plain white gallery walls, something very special can occur. And if you think nature doesn't need the artifice of art added to it, don't forget it would be hard to experience nature at all if it wasn't for the roads that bring us to it, or even the paths that wind within.

## grab characterise this Government's approach to the arts

that he had never been to the Abbey; Eamon de Valera went to the national theatre in 1951. It was just as significant that Seán Ó Faoláin, the most trenchant critic of previous State cultural policy, was appointed as its director in 1956 – making a statement about the council's independence from government. This is not to say that the story of cultural policy since 1945 is one of great progressive achievement. Progress has been slow, piecemeal and inadequate. Key cultural institutions, such as the National Library, National Museum, National Gallery and National Archives, have had to struggle for the most basic of resources, including storage and exhibition space. Big ideas, such as relocating the Abbey, have come and gone, generating acres of comment and analysis and no action. Many important artists, especially performers, still struggle to make a living. But the worst that any government has done since the 1950s is nothing. The most inadequate governments have been simply neglectful. I can't think of one of which it could fairly be said that it was actively destructive of the fragile fabric of our cultural institutions. Now, however, for the first time since the 1930s, we have a Government that is moving beyond benign neglect to active harm. It is pretty bad in itself that the programme for government has virtually nothing to say about cultural policy. There's a bland statement about encouraging touring "in order to protect the State's investment in regional arts infrastructure" – not, one notes, in order to create transformative artistic experiences. And there's an equally bland aspiration to encourage more private sponsorship. But this wouldn't be the first time a government was so cluelessly tokenistic. Nor is this even the first time that arts organisations have faced serious cutbacks in funding, though the drastic effects of cumulative cuts likely to be in the region of 30 per cent have yet to be realised. What is new is the combination of cluelessness, cutbacks and a mania for centralised control. The enormous financial pressure on the whole arts and culture sector makes it crucial that the



A vision of the past: Minister for Arts, Jimmy Deenihan at the National Library and, left, George Orwell, whose novel 1984 the State censored in 1929. Photographs: Alan Betson; AP State has at least two substitutes for money. One is an innovative vision. The other is a determination to strengthen the institutional supports that can help individuals and companies to make the best of hard times. fotoole@irishtimes.com

**For the first time since the 1930s, we have a government that is moving beyond benign neglect to active harm**

That the Government has no vision is obvious (its appointment of an Arts Council with a conspicuous paucity of artists is telling). What's staggering is that the energies it is willing to devote to cultural policy are going into determining the integrity and independence of institutions such as Culture Ireland and the National Library. The only point of all of this seems to be that "responsibility for policy-making will revert to the Department, while agencies will be accountable for implementing policy, assessing outcomes and value for money" seems to suggest that the goal is to reverse 50 years of progress towards establishing cultural bodies as the property of the nation, not of the Government.